

The Department of Psychology

## **Children of the Lord's Resistant Army**

An exploration of social relations from the perspective of Ugandan  
former child combatants

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Master's thesis (2009)

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## **Abstract**

Ever since 1987 the Lord's Resistant Army (LRA), a theocratic rebel force, has been abducting children in Uganda to partake in the conflict against the Ugandan government and its forces. The children's lives are drastically changed in a matter of minutes; they are suddenly forced to whiteness and take part in ruthless brutalities. Some of them live for months, others for years, under dictatorial rule and order. This research is set to explore the multiple challenges regarding social relations faced by child combatants both during and after life with the LRA. Fundamental notions such as, self-perception, perception of other, role taking and group formation are questioned. The research is based in Husserlian phenomenological theory, providing understanding of the children's/adolescence's conscious reflections on their daily experiences. Five different documents containing citations of former child combatants in Uganda are used for analysis in both Sphinx Lexica and Minerva, which is based in phenomenological theory of Meaning Constitution Analysis (MCA). The results show that the children/adolescents feel confused and uncertain about their roles and relations due to the drastic changes in their social networks. The argument follows that the impacts need to be considered as a significant part of their reintegration process.

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Keywords: social relations, child combatant, Uganda, Phenomenology, Meaning constitution analysis

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## Introduction

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The two major motivations for conducting this particular research will be presented in this chapter. The first reason concerns the importance of social relations of child combatants, and the second has significance for understanding how meaning is constituted in subjective experience. Thus ultimately allowing the researcher to comprehend how Ugandan child combatants consciously reflect on their daily experiences regarding their social relations.

### Subject of Study

In an ideal world every child is ensured protection and provided with needs that are in his or her best interest; growth towards adulthood is seen as a vulnerable period and thus each child should be given as much time as necessary to develop. Yet the reality of many children is very different, namely according to the United Nations (UN) there are more than 300 000 child combatants universally, of whom approximately 120 000 are girls (Save The Children, 2008; Webster, 2007). A child combatant is defined in the Paris Principles as:

*“any person below eighteen years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys, and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, or for sexual purposes”*

(Kohort et al., 2008, p.4)

Though impossible to give a total figure the largest number of children (about 122 000) that currently take part in conflicts are found in Africa (UNHCR, 2008). Here one of the longest lasting battles takes place in Uganda, a country with a population of 28.8 million, of which 16,5 million are under 18 (UNHCR, 2008). Ever since the beginning of 1980 roughly 25 000 to 30 000 children, between the ages of 10 to 17, have been abducted by the theocratic rebel group the Lord’s Resistant Army (LRA) (UNHCR, 2008).

According to several reports abducted youth in Uganda undergo extreme challenges both during and after life with the LRA; not only do they suffer from severe physical, psychological and social distress, but also of further difficulties in regards to education and employment (Blattman & Annan, 2008; Chrobok & Akutu, 2008; Dowdney, 2007). Knowing this it is alarming to notice that most

research as well as treatment with abducted youth in Uganda concentrates on psychological disorders, in particular that of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Blattman, 2006; Dowdney, 2007; Guyot, 2007; Harris, 2007). Only a small amount of research acknowledges the child as part of a wider social fabric and none is found in regards to social relations in particular. Seeing that the focal point often lies on individual trauma and curing, this begs the question if not important connections to family and social networks are overlooked. In fact as stated by Kalksvan Lith et al. (2007) whereas the majority of returning youth report having social and economic problems, only a small amount undergo severe mental problems. Moreover mainstream approaches have been criticised as unethical and ethnocentric as they are often based in Western thinking and have their focus on the individual (Dowdney, 2007; Harris, 2007). Thus they overlook traditional understanding of pain and healing, as well as human relations in a collectivist society. In regards to Ugandan former child combatants Wessels (2007, p. 2) points out that “*many of the most pressing issues are culturally constructed and may relate to local beliefs and practises*”. For this reason it is imperative to recognise tradition, culture as well as the role and knowledge of community members. Moreover much discussion points towards the plausible efficiency of quicker healing and adjustment of former child combatants when engaging community members in various activities (Baines, Stover, & Wierda, 2006; Betancourt et al., 2008; Guyot, 2007). To exemplify, much gratitude was shown for setting up community based groups for women and youth in Northern Uganda (Baines et al., 2006). Nonetheless as maintained by several organizations the most common reason for why little research has been conducted on social aspects of child combatants is lack of capacity to collect data and to follow up research after a child has left a reception centre (Blattman, 2006; Dowdney, 2007). This however begs the question of the significance of long term effects.

All said it is startling to see how little research is conducted on child combatants as part of a wider social fabric and thus the rationale of this particular research is to highlight the underlying impacts on the developing child’s perspectives on roles, relationships and social structures both during and after the time with the LRA. Nevertheless it is imperative to point out that the varied confrontations regarding social relations are interconnected with other psychological, social, cultural and political challenges, such as distress and economic hardship, and thus this particular research ought to be seen as one part of the bigger picture.

## Scientific Stance

To be able to understand the plausible challenges regarding social relations of Ugandan former child combatants it is essential to explore their subjective perspectives on the subject matter. The fundamental idea is to avoid preconceptions, opinions and beliefs while adopting a more open approach where one learns to see things the way they stand. For this purpose the ontological and methodological suggestions of Husserlian phenomenology are seen as an ideal standpoint. Namely it allows for understanding the life world of an individual within his or her cultural context. The purpose of the research is thus not to discover causal relations as it is in mainstream science. In fact as stated by Karlsson (1995) though the aim in many scientific articles is to explore subjective experience the method and result section have shown to adopt a purely objective stance, hence contravening with the introduction and final discussion. For this reason the significance of phenomenology that is based in a philosophical ideal and avoids the usage of operationalized variables becomes clear. The idiosyncrasy of the standpoint is that it enables the researcher to understand the underlying meanings of subjective intentions and self reflection. Further it is important to underscore that meaning is not to be seen as fixed but as an ongoing process.

# Context of Study

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## Introduction

The purpose of the following chapter is to provide an outlook of the situation in Uganda. In order to understand the root of the phenomenon ‘child combatant’ it entails discussion on Uganda’s near history as well as the current situation, which in particular is essential to comprehend as it is the social context child combatants are abducted from, and where they return to.



Conflict affected areas in Northern Uganda; Acholi, Lango and Teso, where the hardest hit region is Acholi with Kitgum, Pader and Gulu (Annan, Blattman, & Horton, 2006)



## Historical Background

In 1986 the Ugandan government and the National Resistance Army (NRA), which consisted mostly of Acholi<sup>1</sup> people from the north, were brought down by the rebels in the south. Though this evidently created uproar amongst many people it was not long that most forces settled for peace. Nevertheless a small number of Acholi people continued fighting and because they had little popularity and hardly any material resources they started to raid homes and abduct people. Seen as betrayals many Acholi people who resisted partaking in the conflict were killed (Blattman, 2006). These events are associated with the forming of the LRA, also been known in the past as the Lord's Army and Uganda's People's Democratic Christian Army (UPDCA). Officially it started its acts in 1987. As a sectarian guerrilla army it has been fighting the Ugandan government for years; the conflict is by now one of the longest lasting in Africa. The army is governed by theocracy and thus follows the orders of God, or as often referred to as the Holy Spirit, who Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, is said to be the representative and voice of. The army is further related to several beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, Mysticism, Ugandan traditional religion and even witchcraft. Though controversial opinions exist on whether the army's motives are embedded in political grievance, its actions are most often viewed as non political where the group members are identified as Christian fundamentalists who base their principles on the Ten Commandments (UNHCR, 2008). By and large it seems that the LRA wishes to take over the Ugandan regime in order to govern people according to the Bible and ensure independence as well as unity of Ugandan people.

In 1991 the government started to move people in the north to Internally Displaced People's camps (IDPs) for safety reasons. Though the LRA kept rather low visibility it all changed in 1994 when the Sudanese government started supporting the army with guns and territory. At the same time however the first ever peace talks between the Ugandan government and the LRA leader Joseph Kony were operated through the LRAs mediator Betty Bigombe. Unfortunately no positive development was seen. Namely solely between 2002 and 2003 approximately 10,000 children were abducted (UNHCR, 2008)! Thus in January 2004 President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni reported the acts of the LRA to the International Criminal Court (ICC). A year and a half later an arrest warrant for Joseph Kony and his four senior commanders was issued, whereby ICC announced that the LRA had "*established a pattern of brutalization of civilians by acts including murder, abduction, sexual enslavement, mutilation, as well as burning of houses and looting of camp settlements*" (UNHCR, 2008, p. 1). Especially in regards to forced abduction under the age of 15 the key commanders of

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<sup>1</sup> Acholi: ethnic group in the district of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader in Northern Uganda (Global Report, 2008)

the LRA that were charged included Joseph Kony, Okot Odhiambo, Vincent Otti and Raska Lukwiya, of which the two latter later died. Eventually a widespread fear amongst the Ugandan people was set off in regards to the ICC indictment. It was, and still is though to both discourage the LRA from peace negotiations and weaken the 2000 Amnesty Act offering a framework for surrender and reintegration that has already attracted 6000 LRA soldiers to give up fighting (Baines et al., 2006; UNHCR, 2008). What became further alarming was that ever since international involvement more ambushes were carried out on NGOs and foreign aid workers; the common belief amongst civilians by now is that LRA commanders think the ICC is given out by NGOs (Baines et al., 2006). Then again many believe that pressure by international law will bring an end to the war (UNHCR, 2008).

Finally in 2005 the Ugandan military managed to force the LRA troops to draw back to the Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This was the beginning of an agreement for terminating hostilities, which was signed in Juba 2006. Hardly any occurrences of abductions or even violence were reported at this time, people felt safer and some 300.000 IDPs moved back to their villages. Although the agreements (several smaller were signed after Juba) discussed in detail reconciliation and accountability they never fully reached pure clarity on the juridical processes. Thus of no surprise numerous children were abducted in both Sudan and Uganda in 2007; it is evident that the conflict is still ongoing. The latest news that made international headlines was that of the LRA being accused for a brutal massacre in north eastern DRC with an estimate of 500 victims, which as reported by the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon is the most brutal act by the LRA in years (UNHCR, 2008). To a great extent the neighbouring countries Sudan and the DRC that are also affected by the acts of the LRA are backing up the Ugandan government with the fight against the rebels. According to Baines et al. (2006) Sudan, which earlier mentioned supported the LRA, stopped these activities in 2005 following a peace agreement.

### Current Situation in Uganda

The reality nowadays in Uganda is that over 1.5 million people, who correspond to 80 to 90% of the population in Northern Uganda, still live in IDP camps (Baines et al., 2006). The main districts are Kitgum, Pader and Gulu. Expectedly the conditions in the camps are poor; not only does this involve great amount of death and diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis, but also scarce access to school and livelihood. What is shattering is that some of the poorest children have been wearing

seed sacks while going to school (Baines et al., 2006). Moreover the supply of clean water is very short and most people generally have to rely on aid given by the World Food Programme. This said it is evident that the environment child combatants return to is by no means economically and socially stable. In comparison to the rest of Uganda where 35% of people live below the national poverty line, 65% of the people in the district of Gulu alone represent this category (UNHCR, 2008). Further statistics show that 9% of the children in the camps are orphan, 33% of the children above the age of ten have lost a parent, and 84% of the women are illiterate (Baines et al., 2006).

What is more is that the harsh reality in the camps also creates very low security. It is reported that one third of the people living in the camps hear gunshots daily and approximately 14% of the people recall crime against a family member (UNHCR, 2008). Moreover insecurity leaves many young children and adolescence vulnerable for abduction. A study conducted by Baines et al. (2006) involving an interview with 2,585 people in the camps show dreadful results of 31% of them having had their child abducted, 23% their child mutilated and 45% had witnessed killing of family member. Further research shows that in most cases, youth has been abducted in rural areas while either working in the fields or during night raids (Baines et al., 2006; Blattman & Annan, 2006). For this reason young people are often forced to walk into urban centres to sleep; this phenomenon called 'night commuting' has caught media attention worldwide. The fact that 20,000 children took part in night commuting in the three main districts between the years of 2003 and 2004 demonstrates the seriousness of the situation (UNHCR, 2008). Nevertheless according to interviewed night commuters there are many positive sides to it, namely electricity, more space, as well as provided education and entertainment (Dowdney, 2007). Finally it is imperative to point out that though joining the LRA is either voluntary or forced several studies show that not many children or adolescents have joined the forces voluntarily after 1991 (Blattman, 2006; UNHCR, 2008).

## Previous Research

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### Introduction

To understand the varied challenges of social relations in child combatants it is essential to discuss two main themes, namely child development, in particular in regards to Ugandan culture, as well as previous knowledge on the subject matter. This chapter thus begins with theoretical implications of social relations in middle childhood and adolescence. More precisely it entails short discussion on self-concept, perception of others, peer interaction, role taking and group formation in regards to both periods. Thereon specific cultural differences are underlined. Finally previous research in regards to child combatants in Uganda is presented; first knowledge on children's experiences during the time with the LRA and thereafter regarding their return.

### Fundamentals of Social Relations

Human development is affected by social relations; the way one understands oneself and what one can become is conditioned by the comprehensive changes that take place in one's social world. A similar idea can be found in the ecological system theory (or bio-ecological system theory), originally constructed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, which provides a universal framework for understanding the varied relationships in a child's environment (Segall et al., 1999). The numerous layers consist of both the child's immediate and distant environment including for instance family, peers, neighbourhood, school, community, culture, law and religion. The varied possibilities of interaction are formed between individuals, groups, the social and even the global context. Yet another way to look at social relations is provided by Hartrup (1989) who suggests of a divide between vertical and horizontal relationships, where the first entails asymmetries of roles, power, knowledge and dependence, and the latter of comparable social power (Durkin, 1995). In early childhood (approximately 0-4 years) vertical relationships have core significance where for instance a parent or guardian has more experience and power over the child. Yet in middle childhood (approximately 4-11 years) horizontal relationships become equally as important (i.e. with peers), and finally in adolescence (approximately 12-18 years) major relationships are horizontal where equality and reciprocity show importance (Gardiner, Mutter, & Kosmitzki, 1998). In adulthood again both axes are significant, namely vertical for instance in relation to being a parent, and horizontal concerning for instance one's partner. Nevertheless though dominance of either axis may

exist they are always interconnected. In basic terms while a protective foundation for social relations is built by vertical relationships, the horizontal ones provide the context for one to try out various social skills.

#### *Middle Childhood (4-11 years)*

When reaching the age of middle childhood one is becoming more and more aware of oneself and of one's internal features, encompassing personality traits, knowledge and skills. Nonetheless the understanding of a child's own as well as other's emotions is still rather limited and thus they might become "*flooded by emotional states that dominate temporarily their attention and behaviour*" (Durkin, 1995, p. 142). It is important to note however that the development of self-concept varies between cultures where for instance aspects of owning, self-consciousness (theory of mind) and self-disclosure are not universally equivalent. Further, though more independent than children in early childhood, and with greater experience of social relations, children in middle childhood are still very much dependent on adult supervision (Durkin, 1995).

Around middle childhood children have developed a compound understanding of relationships and other people, along with their expectations. In fact as stated by Durkin (1995) it is through relationships a child creates awareness of other people and their distinct characteristics. As mentioned earlier horizontal relationships become increasingly important at this period; apart from being vital they are also in most cases very complex and selective. Relations formed in this age are based on strong and enduring bonding and thus as stated by Rubin (1980) the loss of a peer may be an extremely devastating experience (Durkin, 1995). Moreover several studies show that in cases of loss of a parent along with primary attachment peer relations in middle childhood have served as a substitute (Dontas et al., 1985; Youngblade and Belsky, 1992; in Durkin, 1995). In this case however a core influence is that of a horizontal relationship with equal social power. Moreover the functions of peer groups in middle childhood are characterised as similar to adults; they provide collective support, belongingness, individuality, shared norms and development of social identity (Turner et al., 1987; Hogg, 1992, in Durkin, 1995). Unlike girls, boys social groups are often organised hierarchically where positions or ranks are given and where someone is selected to be in control of directions and decisions (Sherif and Sherif, 1956, in Durkin, 1995). The rationale behind these hierarchies is for the boys to learn about activities of domination and control. Social role taking varies to a great extent between individuals, where some may be more prone to pro-social behaviour and aim for popularity. Games as well as particular occasions, such as birthdays and exams, are seen as essential for providing guidance of varied social roles (Valsiner, 2000). Finally

it is imperative to point out that several studies show that children at this stage do not obtain full understanding of social structures; one may for instance comprehend the idea of a shop but not quite grasp the complexities of running it (Durkin, 1995).

### *Adolescence (12-18 years)*

Though not fully regarded as an adult, the stage of adolescence entails independence and less need of control. In general it is described as a unique time period as it is the shift between child- and adulthood; it is a period of mostly undifferentiated stages, hence often leaving the person with no clear sight of direction (Valsiner, 2000). In short it is the time of change and multiple challenges. Even more than in middle childhood, adolescence is the crucial time for self-understanding; it is the time when personal identity is developed and when the purpose of life is questioned. At the same time this brings along a greater amount of egocentrism. In some cases adolescence also involves identity crises where one is left perplexed with one's self-definition, self-image and contradicting values (Montemayor and Eisen, 1977; van der Werff, 1985, in Durkin, 1995).

The following quote by Durkin (1995, p. 307) describes well the idea of how adolescence perceive friends: *“young people think of friendship in terms of interpersonal dependencies and exchange of confidences, and incorporate awareness of the complexity of personalities into their accounts of how relationships work”*. At the same time the importance of family decreases while the value of friends increases, nevertheless family relations are still also highly valued. Correspondingly identification with a peer group becomes significant and though it varies between individuals, lack of peer involvement might be hurtful. As shown in a study conducted by Buhrmester (1992) adolescence show less sign of depression when involved with close relationships with peers (Durkin, 1995). Furthermore adolescence is also the time of greater reflection on the social world and of reaching pure intellectual development where one is able to weight choices and imagine alternatives.

### Cultural Context

*“Seek the good of the community, and seek your own good.  
Seek your own good, and you seek your own destruction”*

(Oguah, 1984, p.221, in Nsamenang, 1992)

The above quote may seem rather awkward in regards to individualistic cultural values, yet it is the perfect illustration of how in some parts of the world, in this case Africa, the needs of community

are of higher rank than individual interest. A general view on cultural differences of self-concept is that they are often discussed in regards to dimensions of individualism and collectivism; namely as explained by Triandis (1989) self-concept is early on linked with cultural values and beliefs (Gardiner et al., 1998). An illustrating example on the significance of cultural and social beliefs is provided by Dowdney (2007). According to him in Sierra Leone disability is believed to be a supernatural punishment by a mother and thus a child who is missing a limb cannot be reunified into society simply by giving him or her, a prosthetic limb along with help and emotional support. This clearly shows how different frames of judgement are created in cultures, which evidently serve as a foundation for social principles of acceptance and rejection.

Furthermore differences between child rearing patterns can often vary drastically were parents and society in general either promote welfare of the individual or alternatively of the collective (Gardiner et al, 1998). As shown in several studies welfare in Uganda is based on collective traditions. For instance in order to heal and strengthen social bonds of former child combatants the best practise is claimed to be community based treatment where members partake in traditional rituals (Baines et al., 2006; Guyot, 2007; Harris, 2007). As stated by Guoyt (2007, p.11) “*cleansing rituals practised by local spiritual leaders can pave the way for community healing*”, thus implying of collective welfare. Furthermore while self-concept in collectivistic and dependent cultures is to a great extent identified according to relationships, this is hardly the case in individualistic and independent cultures where self-concept is not primarily defined by interrelations (Gardiner et al., 1998). Interestingly then, as reported by Guyot (2007) former child combatants are often keen on participating in cleansing rituals for the reason that community members would not see them as *cen* (contaminated), which indicates that self-concept in Ugandan culture is to a great extent identified by relationships. Finally it is imperative to bring up the spiritual world that often is part of the African concept of the universe. The Ugandan culture as many other African cultures believe that anybody can be attacked by spirits of the dead (Hopwood & Osburn, 2008). In Uganda one may be possessed by *cen*, which shows that a person is guilty of committing crime if it does not disappear; *cen* is though to be infectious (Hopwood & Osburn, 2008). All said, for one to comprehend how a child combatant in Uganda perceives his or her reality along with relations to others it is vital to take account of the eccentricity of culture. In phenomenology where man is perceived as a situated being, cultural aspects are evidently incorporated (Sages et al., 2004).

## “Children of Kony”

*“The rebels told me to join them, but I said no.  
Then they killed my smaller brother. I changed my mind”*

(Dickson-Gômes, 2008, p.5)

The first question that comes into mind in regards to child combatants in Northern Uganda, is why children? In general children are, in strict physical terms, much faster, flexible, inconspicuous, and smaller than older combatants (UNHCR, 2008). Apart from that they are more easily trained, indoctrinated and made to follow order, which arguably are the main reasons why they are abducted (Blattman & Annan, 2006). It is further stated that they are also most probably less fearless, which nevertheless may be due to the fact that the children are often drugged (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008). As maintained by Becker *“commanders see children as cheap, compliant, and effective fighters”* (Guyot, 2007, p. 2). While living in the bush the role of a child varies greatly, amongst other things one can serve as a messenger, porter, servant, guard, spy, cook, lay/clear landmines or alternatively be a fighter. Many child combatants are forced to, not only kill in combat but also to kill and mutilate family members, civilians and other child combatants. According to Chrobok & Akutu (2008) the girls and boys have very similar roles; both are trained as combatants. Though not much is written about gender specific roles, the main difference found is that girls are often forced into sexual service as well as marriage, thus the reason for girls generally to stay longer in the bush is also believed to be their role as wives and mothers (UNHCR, 2008). A different view on the matter is that girls actually aspire to get married in order to be respected and avoid sexual abuse (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). Further according to the UNHCR (2008) an estimated 24% of the child combatants are girls. Generally is important to note is that the children’s stay with the LRA varies greatly, namely it can be anything from one day to ten years.

Orders and rules, initially given by the Spirits, are part of daily life; at times they are said to provide a feeling of safety as one knows how to avoid being punished and get respect (Mergelsberg, 2005). Furthermore rituals and symbolic deeds, such as carrying a holy stone given to battle, or not hurting certain animals, i.e. snakes, illustrate that protection in the bush is very figurative (Mergelsberg, 2005). Nevertheless Cortes & Buchanan (2007) point out that sense of safety is also attained through strong group cohesion. Harris (2007) further adds that a new family structure is often formed entailing a father, who is one of the commanders as well as brothers and sisters, who are the other fighters. A theory put forward by Mergelsberg (2005) is that being abducted entails often two



main phases, namely that of ‘growing out’ of civilian life and ‘growing in’ to life with the LRA. In more detail he explains that while ‘growing out’ the child struggles to reject the ‘new’ world while striving to bond with other newly abducted, only for them to end up being tied together in prevention of escaping. ‘Growing in’ therefore becomes the way to survive and to find protection, which in many cases leads to making an effort to get rank (Buchanan, 2007 & Mergelsberg, 2005). Ultimately, killing becomes a means to attain particular goals where some would even say they enjoy it (Mergelsberg, 2005). Yet another theory is that children do not succumb to psychological domination, as stated by Wolins (1993) “*resilient survivors prevail by carving out a part of life they can control amid the swirling confusion and upheavals of their environment*” (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007, p.47). A sense of control is kept by continuously reminding oneself of one’s roots and family (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). Additionally Werner and Smith (1992) claim that children who behold such toughness own traits of strong internal locus of control<sup>2</sup>, self-belief and autonomy (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). All said it is evident that several studies show that children in the bush repress their feelings partially because it is required, but also for the reason that that it is the only way to deal with the brutalities (Dickson-Gömes, 2008).

### *Homecoming*

As many of the abducted children stay uncounted for, a rough estimate is that approximately four out of five escape the LRA, which often takes place during times children are left unsupervised (Blattman & Annan, 2006). Though returning child combatants in Uganda are not taken care of according to the official framework of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) the procedures are nevertheless very similar. In Uganda many returning child combatants either surrender or are captured by Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) that register the children and can hold them for questioning up to 48 hours. Nevertheless, just as many children are not recorded by the UPDF because they fear the government forces, and of being labelled as LRA soldiers (Annan et al., 2006; Baines et al., 2006; UNHCR, 2008). Therefore some of the children return straight to their families and relatives while others end up in reception centres, which purpose is to offer support and assistance with the challenges confronted during the first months of return. The hope at the reception centres is that the children and adolescence come back to civilian life as precious and prolific members of society. Though the structure of activities vary at each centre according to their principles and beliefs they more or less include medical assistance, family tracing, entertainment, some form of counselling, as well as education in life skills, especially in regards to

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<sup>2</sup> Internal locus of control: an individual’s perception of underlying causes in his/her life; concept by Julian Rotter 1950 (Werner and Smith, 1992, in Cortes et al., 2007)

reintegration to family and community (Baines et al., 2006). As stated at several occasions the former child combatants most often find their three to four month stay at the reception centres extremely valuable (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008; UNHCR, 2008). All in all, as maintained in the Cape Town Principles by the UN (1997) the aim is to not institutionalize the children, but to reunite them with their families (UNHCR, 2008). Nevertheless one of the main challenges in regards to the Cape Town Principles is that it does not provide much guidance as no clear framework for reunification exists. Similarly the structure of DDR, or the comparable procedure employed in Uganda, is also argued to be limited to strictly external features, thus neglecting the deep rooted problems faced by the returning youth (Guyot, 2007; Harris 2007).

## Challenges of Social Relations

### *Construction of 'new' Social Fabric*

In basic terms the social contexts of a former child combatant before, during, and after life with the LRA are very different. The impact of the experience vary according to a large amount of factors, including personal characteristics, social relations, age, length of stay, the socio-political situation as well as the level of involvement and exposure (Dickson-Gömes, 2008; Wessels, 2007). Arguably however it is naturally impossible for the child or adolescent to reconstruct his or her previous life that existed before or during the time with the LRA. Nevertheless as suggested by Dickson-Gömes (2008) there is the possibility of combining both present and previous emotional ties, and to allow for this to take place it is essential that the space where a child is set to establish his or her 'new' social fabric encourages him or her to do so. This said it is imperative to note that the activities and objectives of some of the reception centres have been criticised to place too much focus on re-educating youth instead of allowing them to re-establish their emotional ties, important social networks and in general their awareness of belonging to a broader sense of humanity. In line with Dickson-Gömes (2008, p.339): "*re-educating implies that the types of relationships to be established will seek to make the child to be what someone else wants them to be*", thus overlooking the capabilities and strengths of a returning child combatant. On the contrary however it is also claimed that the positive side of the reception centres is that they represent an institutional framework that for so long has been absent from a child's or adolescent's social context. And thus as a relatively safe place it allows the child to try out and reflect upon challenging emotions such as credibility, openness, kindness, empathy and even responsibility; all extremely significant for life in civil society (Harris, 2007).

### *Social Roles and Group Cohesion*

Evidently the time in the bush has a tremendous impact on one's identity, not solely from the subjective point of view but also according to others. As stated by Dowdney (2007, p. 7) "*The sense of self is socially defined – it is determined by an individual's place within the social structure*". Thus the previous roles of being a son, daughter, brother, sister, child or teenager do no longer function as a foundation for defining oneself when returning from life with the LRA (Dickson-Gömes, 2008). The social relations, encompassing specific roles and interaction, constructed during time with the LRA thus must be seen as a starting point for understanding the perspectives and identities of formerly abducted youth. Constant witnessing of death, making the future rather questionable, explains why many of the former child combatants only picture themselves as soldier (Dickson-Gömes, 2008). Several authors refer to identity crises where loss of routine and confusion of shifting status are serious challenges during immediate stages of return (Dickson-Gömes, 2008; Harris, 2007). Some contradicting opinion exists though on whether it is crucial for former child combatants to recognise their dual roles as both victims and betrayers, or for them to solely accept responsibility for performed atrocities (Dickson-Gömes, 2008; Harris, 2007). Finally it is interesting to note that former child combatants are more active with political participations than their non abducted peers, namely they are 24% more likely to vote and twice as likely to become community leaders (Blattman & Annan, 2006). The underlying reason for this, according to Blattman & Annan (2006) is that it provides an opportunity to express frustration; the more violence experienced in the bush, the more likely one is to take part in political activities. Likewise the returning youth is also more likely to take part in organization at for instance school or church.

By and large for a former child combatant to adjust to civil society it then requires serious recognition and renegotiation of social dynamics, which often concern leadership, alliances and group perspective. Naturally tough circumstances with community, family and peer reconciliation often drive former child combatants to bond with each other. In theory it is also hard to break the connection with what is now seen as a substitute family (Dickson-Gömes, 2008). On one hand it is argued to strengthen their feel of self worth and belonging, yet on the other hand it is claimed that it further decreases acceptance and reintegration into community (Dowdney, 2007). As reported by teachers, in contrast to traditional forms of learning that stress individual achievement, former child combatants often find it challenging to comprehend the idea of learning from one another as they are used to define and measure accomplishment by group (Dickson-Gömes, 2008).

### *Community Reconciliation*

Arguably community along with culture and tradition play an extremely important role for the psychosocial wellbeing of former child combatants; as stated by Erickson (1980) the identity of a person is affected by the general view of good and bad by members of society (Dickson-Gomes, 2008). Several studies argue that the reality of many former child combatants is very tough and unjust where their return to a community often entails stigmatization, insult, blame, bullying and rejection (Betancourt, 2008; Dowdney, 2007; UNHCR, 2008). In particular it is pointed out that girls returning with babies born in the bush are badly rejected; the baby is said to be born by the vengeful spirit (UNHCR, 2008). At times community members, peers in particular show jealousy for assistance given to returning youth; this consists of either a small amount of money (10,000 – 20,000 Ugandan shillings equivalent to US\$5-10) or educational support (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008). Hence in order to receive aid non abducted youth have been shown to misrepresent themselves (Blattman & Annan, 2006).

Betancourt (2008) further points out that the youth that are rejected and verbally abused show three times as high negative social behaviour and distress than those who are more welcomed. The general view is that communities are more open and welcoming in certain contexts and less in other (Betancourt, 2008). Similarly it is interesting that at times it is claimed that community members do not hold the abducted youth accountable for their actions, yet at other times it is stated that they demand the child or adolescent to take responsibility for the atrocities he or she has done in the past, which at times even has taken place in one's own community (Blattman & Annan, 2006; Dowdney, 2007). Hence it seems that community reconciliation varies across regions, between individuals and depending on the context. Considering the unexpectancy of circumstances it seems imperative for a child to be well prepared for the process of reintegration into community life. An encouraging example of reunification presented by Harris (2007) is when former child combatants in Sierra Leone invited community members to watch a play where they asked for acceptance. All people in the audience, who had earlier said they feared the boys, were transfixed of seeing such goodness and sincerity in them. Yet another example is that of a World Bank funded program where formerly abducted youth are given economic empowerment in the form of community building, which evidently signifies of collective life and healing in unison (Guyot, 2007). As seen from the examples it is evident that contact between former child combatants and community members is central for forming a mutual understanding and forgiveness.

### *Acceptance of Family, Siblings and Peers*

The term family in Uganda incorporates in many senses more than just the nuclear family of parents and siblings that is often the case in Western society. Namely in Ugandan culture family represents not only relatives of blood relations, but also people who one has formed relations through shared experiences and close emotional ties (Dickson-Gomes, 2008). In cross cultural psychology family is perceived as a group; as a primary and usually permanent group it is thus seen as the core foundation for identity formation (Chen & Kasper, 2004). Therefore it is of no surprise that several qualitative and quantitative studies show that the support and acceptance of family is in many cases the most valued and significant factor for long term emotional wellbeing and social functioning of a former child combatant (Betancourt, 2008; Blattman & Annan, 2006). Unlike with recognition by community members where both acceptance and rejection is common, an extensive study conducted in Northern Uganda show that 94% of the interviewed youth were welcomed without blame or abuse by their families (Betancourt, 2008). The main challenge apart from being accepted is thereon stated to be the adjusting to the family structure that not only may feel distant due to the time spent away, but also may have changed in structure during the years, with for instance a family member(s) having been killed (Harris, 2007). However the topic of sibling relationships come out as more problematic for the reason that brothers and sisters often are afraid of being associated with the LRA and therefore also being stigmatized and teased (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008). Whereas with peers again, age seem to be the indicator for acceptance; children under 14, girls in particular, are more likely to be received positively than children above that age (Chrobok & Akutu, 2008).

# Theoretical Underpinnings

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## Underlying Principles of Phenomenology

### *The Phenomenological Attitude*

In general terms phenomenology can be explained with reference to the original Greek meaning of the word phenomenon, namely *phaenestai*, which indicates “*to show itself in itself*”, “*to bring to light*” and “*to appear*” (Moustakas 1994, p. 26). In other words phenomena are the elementary units of human experience, namely what emerges and how things come into light. In order to clarify the fundamental standpoint of phenomenology it is imperative to discuss the differentiation between the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude. While the former is the non-reflective, naive stance of perceiving objects in everyday life, the latter is one’s conscious reflection of objects. In other words the natural attitude depicts for instance one’s driving to work, recognizing both concrete and intangible objects, such as a camera or a number, as well as institutional documentation; it is the foundation of one’s daily thinking and behaving regarding other people, things and different circumstances (Sokolowski 2000). Additionally the natural attitude involves imagined things and activities that are found away from one’s direct experiences. This non-reflective stance, driven by intentions is what the phenomenological attitude strives to reflect upon. Called the transcendental attitude it explores the involvement between the subject experiencing and the object, as experienced in the life world. In line with Sokolowski (2000, p. 116) “*besides being biological, psychological, and subjective beings, we also enter as agents into the space of reasons*”. This said it is clear that phenomenology does not merely explore biological and psychological responses questioning what something is or does, but instead aims to discover constitution of meaning. Finally, in phenomenological thinking true objectivity is found in subjective perception.

### *Perceptual Consciousness*

A fundamental part of phenomenology is that of acknowledging and describing “*our pre-reflective involvement with the world*”, or simply, ‘*perception*’ as termed by Merleau-Ponty (Matthews 2006, p.21). In line with him all consciousness is based in perceptual consciousnesses, in that perception is our primary source for understanding the meaning of concepts. As explained by Husserl each new perception may broaden the horizon of a particular object; a horizon thus represents a person’s comprehension of all experiences belonging to a particular object. It is, as stated by Sages (2003), the horizons of conception that are brought to light by help of phenomenology. Hence subjective

perception of experience is the fundamental link to knowledge about the world. Though in many ways this may be seen as practical engagement with things one is not to mistake it as an interest in the cognitive relations to objects but rather as the subject's way of relating to things. The fundamental idea here is that *"all objects are what they are only through the acts in which they become objectively present for us; there is nothing but an interwoven web of such intentional acts"* (Zahavi 2001, p.6). As stated by Husserl it is the *"non-objectifying quality"* as opposed to the *"objectifying quality"* of a thing that needs to be emphasized (Moustakas 1994, p. 29). Perception therefore needs to be scrutinized when one is to question a child's representation and construction of his or her reality; it is a matter of personal interest which includes not solely cognitive and intellectual importance but also that of for instance imaginative, aesthetic, emotional and practical interest (Matthew, 2006).

### *Time and Temporality*

To further develop the idea of perception it is crucial to discuss the aspects of time and temporality. Arguably many theories in development psychology explain the psychological state of a person through causal relations of experiences in life, where for instance abandonment in early childhood leads to a particular form of an attachment disorder, or pressure along with high expectations by parents, leads to unrelenting standards later on in life. The problem here according to Merleau-Ponty is the reductionist stance that disregards the fact that historical progression is an actual unity, namely the unity of oneself *"is not that of something unchanging which underlies the surface changes, but of something which is perpetually changing"* (Matthew 2006, p. 107). In other words though it is essential to analyse how historical time is part of one's present one can not get to the heart of a person's psychological state without looking beyond sequential events and recognizing that no fixed unity exists, only that of direct and indirect experience as well as continuous involvement. This said it becomes clear that one's present is not determined by one's past but rather that one's past provides the context for one's present, in which one is able to leave behind the past. In this way healing has its focal point in the present, namely what a person is, as opposed to what a person has been. To take an example, when a former child combatant continues to act violently he or she is prolonging past experiences into present, whereas when giving up violent behaviour he or she transcends the past showing positive growth. Here it is imperative to specify that being-in-the-world concerns active involvement with other existing beings, things and the environment. Not only does human action constitute meaning to a present situation but it also explains the direction of one's life (Matthews, 2006). This said it becomes clear that the connections between subjects and

objects in the world are found through involvement and not purely in objects themselves as they have no meaning outside one's consciousness.

### *Intentionality of Consciousness*

As indicated earlier intentionality plays a central role in phenomenology; it implies of the relation between the constituted object and the intentional-constitutive subject (Moustakas, 1994). This suggests that human nature is always directed towards something, namely one sees, imagines or thinks *of* something. However it is imperative to point out that the term 'intention' is not to be understood in its practical meaning. The principle of intentionality, then, as stated by Husserl, is that all consciousness is consciousness of something where fundamentally the horizons of perception are generated by intention. To clarify, instead of describing human acts such as feeling, perceiving, remembering and thinking as simply psychological, Husserl (1931) refers to *noeses* emphasizing not only perception per se but also of how something is perceived (Moustakas, 1994). The two concepts of *noeses*, coined by Husserl are *noesis* and *noema*, of which the first refers to the act of consciousness and the second to the meaning or sense content that is achieved by the act. These central concepts of the intentional nature of human cognition coexist where noetic phenomenon are identified with noematic features and vice versa. As stated by Moustakas (1994, p. 73) "*Description of the noematic qualities is the objective component and always relates to a subjective consciousness, the noesis. A noetic description is always subjective and connects with the object as perceived*". Thus the key for discovering deep layers of meaning are found in the noetic-noematic formations.

### *Worldliness*

*"A bare subject without a world never 'is' "*

(Heidegger, cited in Stolorow, 2006)

The above quote exemplifies another significant aspect to consider in phenomenology, namely that the world is not to be seen as an object but merely as relational to a subject, an opinion shared by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. That is to say that reality is being in the world, meaning that human consciousness absorbs the context of the world, its cultures, and its history; humans are found *in* the world (Heidegger, 1953). The *lifeworld* (Lebenswelt) presented by Husserl is a representation of a person's horizons altogether; it is the state of affairs in which one's experiences worldliness that continuously keeps on transforming. A similar idea can be found in Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*, the being of 'my own' being and its underlying nature of *being-in-the-world*,



which implies that beings are always engaged with the world. The key is that the notion of being-in-the-world is not to be understood as a procedure or construction of something but rather as an existential expression of one's being that is intertwined with the world, which thus becomes a character of Dasein. Heidegger stresses that being is "*always already understood*" and therefore "*brought to, not uncovered in experience*", which clarifies the idea of it being a prior to understanding thus not a part of a thought or a thing but merely the relation between them (Glazebrook 2000, p.47). The interesting, yet at the same time challenging part in grasping the meaning of worldliness by lifeworld and being-in the world is that they signify both personal as well as intersubjective existence and for this reason it is imperative to take a closer look at intersubjectivity and relations to others.

## Others and I

### *Being with Others*

Likewise with the existence of the world, the existence of other people is never questioned; quoting Schutz (1970, p. 164): "*Man takes for granted the bodily existence of fellow men, their conscious life, the possibility of intercommunication, and the historical givenness of social organization and culture*". One is both directly and indirectly aware of the external other, thus *part of* humanness. With the notion 'Mitda-sein' Heidegger draws attention to '*being with*' others where the other is not just objectively there but rather a being akin to Dasein (1953, p.111). As one may argue this theory easily brings to the fore a view of 'I' and thus separation from other people, however Heidegger underlies that this is not the implication of the conception of Mitda-sein. On the contrary Mitda-sein is a fundamental part of Dasein because it is comprehended through being; simultaneously as an irreducible part of Dasein, Mitda-sein has an impact to the understanding of being (Heidegger 1953). Along the lines of Heidegger (1953, p.111): "*The others...they are, rather, those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself, those among whom one is, too*". Essentially then the awareness of plurality is embedded in one's consciousness and is explored as part of 'I', thus not seen as an element lying outside the limits of subjective experience.

### *Intersubjectivity*

Moreover it is imperative to point out that knowledge of the world is generated in personal experience. As stated by Zahavi (2001) the idea put forward by Husserl is that "*the constitutive performance of transcendental intersubjectivity...is in no way carried out by a collective consciousness, but is executed by the individual subject – yet has the peculiarity of necessarily*

*presupposing an experience of others, a relation to the other*" (p. 18). With this he means that self-perception and self experience are the basis for intersubjectivity as well as for knowledge of others and therefore it can be argued that the latter solely exists due to 'self' (Zahavi 2001). Evidently awareness, comprehension and meaning of other objects are based on one's own perception, experiences, imagination, memories and reflections. Nevertheless Husserl points out that the key to comprehend one's objective existence lies in intersubjectivity. It is, as Sages (2003) says, that experience is never merely personal but always part of a community; "*its origin lies in the dialectical constitution of 'I' and the 'Other'*" (p. 5). Correspondingly both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty stresses that neither subjects nor objects stand alone but they are jointly dependent of each others existence (Jones 2001; Priest 1998). What can be gathered from this is that intersubjectivity is a core element of one's reality.

### *Understanding the Other*

Ultimately one comes to understand that the other is like oneself, yet that individual experience is distinctive. The reason for pointing this out becomes relevant when delving into questions of motivation and indications (*Anzeichen*) of other's lived experiences. To explain further, yet without going into great detail, a few ways of how people commonly deal with questions of other people's lived experiences ought to be mentioned. Firstly, there is imagination where one puts himself/herself in the shoes of the other person, hence imagining his/her objectives. As an alternative one might think of a similar situation that one has been in, in the past and in this way recall specific reasons for *why* the action was carried out. Nonetheless to be precise, understanding the motivations and intentions of other people is purely a reflective analysis for it is not until two subjects are closely involved with each other that genuine motivational comprehension can take place. By referring to Husserl and that of *originary presence* (one's original perception) Shutz (1970) explains that the psychic life of 'other' is perceived in the form of being present with others, that is co-presence.

## The Phenomenological Method

### *Phenomenological Reduction*

The Latin root for reduction is *re-ducere*, which means leading back, withholding or withdrawing (Sokolowski, 2000, p.49). Synonymously in phenomenological reduction, introduced by Husserl, the aim is to "*reduce objects to the meaning they have for us*"; it is a break with the natural, unreflective attitude and belief of the world existing independently from consciousness (Karlsson p.

48). In regards to social relations Husserl even discussed in terms of *intersubjective reduction* where the focal point is besides the experience of self, additionally on the constituted experience of other self's and community (Schutz 1970). By way of explanation in phenomenological reduction the goal is to analyze experience as opposed to factual existence or outward aspects of objects. This standpoint of withdrawing, termed *epoché* by Husserl, entails that empirical subjectivity and naïve presumptions of the world are suspended through *bracketing*. What remain is perception and reflection, namely pure cogitation; in line with Sokolowki (2000) "*we look at what we normally look through*" (p.50). In phenomenological reduction the process of looking and describing is done over and over again, diverse sides and viewpoints are explored of the bracketed phenomena, hence offering a reflective analysis of the intentional formations of noema and noesis. Husserl often wrote about getting in touch with pure consciousness by exhausting one's perceptual views of experience, in this way the meaning content (noema) of subjective experience is brought into light. Though it is impossible to claim that all perceptual angles (horizons) of a particular object can be analyzed through phenomenological reduction, it nevertheless, provides an exceptionally deep exploration of the quality of experience due to the numerous amendments that provide a more and more truthful account of what really appears before us.

#### *Validity and Generalisation*

Standard criteria of evaluation for valid scientific research are principally formulated by positivistic thinking. As explained by Seale (1999) "*conception of reliability and replicability are rooted in a realist view of a single external reality knowable through language*" and "*validity in this tradition refers to nothing less than truth, known through language referring to a stable social reality*" (Taylor, 2001, p.319). In other words research of a relativist account typifies reality as timeless, fixed and inflexible; research is rational as it aims at expression rather than investigation of sensation. In phenomenology the standpoint is different. The fundamental concept of meaning can not be evaluated by same criteria; the focal point is not causality but that of experienced meaning (Sages et al., 2002). Based in subjective experience it reflects flexibility and continuity. As maintained by Ardent (Sages et al., 2002) generalization in phenomenology is not that of masses of anonymous people, but rather of an individuals constituted meaning, which ultimately signifies of a plausible overview to other cases. The essential aim of exploration is not facts, but meaning that is constituted by intended conscious acts.

# Methodology

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## Introduction

The research was grounded in phenomenological thinking using Husserl's conceptions of the epoché and phenomenological reduction as basis of analysis. As opposed to experimental design, centralized in method this particular approach provides a purely open, object-centred exploration. Instead of explaining the human psyche the analyst, omitting predictions, preconceptions and expectations, is aiming at understanding how meaning is constituted in subjective experience.

This chapter starts with describing the documents used for the study. Thereon the analysis is presented. This consists of two separate methods, of which the first one applied is the Sphinx Lexica, which is a Software that is used for studying the surface of texts (Sages et al., 2002). Primarily it was adopted to set off the second and main approach, namely Meaning Constitution Analysis (MCA), which conversely is used to explore a text in depth disclosing intended meaning of subject (Sages & Lahlou, 2004). For their contrary means of handling a text the two softwares complement each other by providing wide-ranging tools for analysing data; though the data is mainly treated qualitatively it can also be explored using statistical treatment. Therefore one may argue that the conventional divide between qualitative and quantitative methods is here outdated (Sages et al. 2003). Importantly both Sphinx and Minerva provide systematic methods for analysing data and because the methods can be applied to all sorts of texts, including websites, documents, books and interviews, they provide immense flexibility. Additionally they are both unconstrained by cultural values and beliefs.

## Research Material

All five documents used in the research [table 1] discuss experiences of former child combatants in Uganda. The documents were retrieved from the World Wide Web and they were chosen for their relevance and recent date of publishing. All quotes (145 in total) given by the children and adolescence were extracted from the texts and divided into two categories, namely that of the time during the LRA and time after the LRA. No statements were found indicating of the time before their life with the LRA. Finally it is important to note that main methods used in the studies are open ended questionnaires and case studies. All of the studies used a different amount of participants. It is believed that the articles represent a good sample as they discuss the same subject yet use different methods with varied amount of participants.

Table 1.

Documents selected for study

<p><b>1. Returning Home, Children's perspectives on reintegration – A case study of children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Teso, eastern Uganda.</b> Vera Chrobok and Andrew S. Akutu (2008) - Published by Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers - Qualitative study; interviews and group discussion; 116 formerly abducted youth</p> <p><b>2. On the nature and causes of LRA abduction: What the abductees say</b> Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan (2008) - Individual study - Qualitative study; open ended questionnaire; 462 formerly abducted youth</p> <p><b>3. The State of Youth and Youth protection in Northern Uganda</b> Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman and Roger Horton - Published by UNICEF (2006) - Mixed method; Survey; 750 formerly abducted male youth; case study (in depth interview); 30 formerly abducted youth</p> <p><b>4. Psychosocial support for war affected children in Northern Uganda: Lessons learnt</b> Dr. Lucia Castelli, Elena Locatelli and Mark Canavera (2005) - Published by Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers - Qualitative study; open ended questionnaire; 1481 formerly abducted youth</p> <p><b>5. Crossing Boundaries; Experiences of returning "child soldiers"</b> Ben Mergels berg (2005) - Individual study - Qualitative study; case studies (in depth interviews); 4 formerly abducted youth</p>
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## Applied Methods

### *The Sphinx Lexica*

In the main, the Sphinx Lexica offers statistical analyses for studies using a qualitative approach. As a method it is based on computing word frequencies providing detailed information on the content of the text and lexical approximation including varied features such as for instance semantical networks, word associations, word dominance, repeated segments, grouping of similar terms, as well as an outlook of the environment of each given word or group of words. In other words it can be used to provide information on nominal, ordinal, scaled, numerical, textual and coded forms of variables (Sages et al. 2002). What is more is that especially in cases of an extensive corpus it enables one to extract sentences according to a wished theme. In this particular study where the previously conducted interviews were rather lengthy the main purpose of the software was hence to uncover sentences disclosing forms of social relations. Nevertheless it was also used for discovering dominating words as well as group correlations. Finally it is imperative to reiterate that as the

Sphinx Lexica is extremely efficient and well ordered in nature it ensures objectivity and provides careful attention to all parts of the text (Sages et al. 2002).

### *Meaning Constitution Analysis (MCA)*

#### *a) The Rationale of Meaning Constitution*

Fundamentally the aim of the research is to comprehend subjective meaning constitution, namely that of people's conscious reflections on their experiences in daily life. Rooted in Husserlian thinking the central philosophy as well as the point of departure of the analysis thus involves acknowledgement of the natural attitude and employment of the *epoché*, which as explained earlier, refers to the suspension of the natural attitude, encompassing presumptions and pre-understandings of the world. That is to say that this method of transcendental reflection offers the possibility to explore the underlying meanings and origins of an individual's past and present experiences that normally go unseen. By grasping the multiple aspects of meanings it is then possible to further create an understanding of a person's perceptions, expectations, as well as future possibilities. Though the focal point is placed on the individual a core principle is to consider the context that each experience takes place in, evidently then considering also cultural features.

#### *b) MCA – Minerva in Practise*

The software used for analysing meaning constitution is called Minerva; its exceptionality is that it offers the means to conduct a phenomenological analysis generating deep rooted understanding of an individual's life world. Thus Minerva is to be used with texts that consist of individual's free expressions. What needs to be clarified is that the main goal is not to bring about psychological theory through induction of lengthy descriptions of individual statements but to construct an in depth analysis of the essence of experience by looking at specific examples while adopting a stance away from theoretical assumptions. Furthermore in comparison to a questionnaire or survey, Minerva provides more flexibility along with greater insight as its standpoint is not set within fixed boundaries (Sages 2004). Next follows a detailed description of the procedure using Minerva.

#### *Stage one: Meaning Units*

The initial step using Minerva is that of breaking sentences into smaller *meaning units* as a consequence of the epoché. The rationale behind this is that evidently smaller meaning units increase control and accuracy while at the same time making the evaluation process easier for other researchers. In practical terms this entails that a division is made at each point of the text where the

analyst finds even a small amount of meaning, thus forming a unit of the words chosen. Thereon each meaning unit, which often consists of only a few words, is numbered in order to make the process systematic and clear. What ought to be pointed out that is that the process is not based on grammar or syntactic, however it is important for the analyst to stay consistent during the process. To illustrate the primary step in Minerva an example is given in table two that is based on the original data [table 2].

Table 2.  
Breaking sentences into meaning units

Free expression:	<i>Killing in the bush for the commander, it is fame.</i>
Meaning Units:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Killing in the bush</li> <li>2) For the commander</li> <li>3) It is fame</li> </ol>

*Stage two: Pure Meaning of Modalities*

After the first step follows the formation and application of *modalities*, which are the descriptions of the way each meaning unit is experienced. Theoretically speaking modalities signify what Husserl called the noematic features, which are the meanings of the noesis (the act of consciousness). They thus characterize the subjective experience of life-world. In practical terms the second purpose of the epoché is to separate personal expression from expressed meaning found in the natural attitude (Sage et al. 2003). In its simplicity modalities symbolize different form of existential features. There are various types of them and they are further categorised according to the different varieties they hold, such as belief (i.e. certainty, possibility), function (i.e. perceptive, imaginative), time (i.e. present, future), affect (i.e. positive and negative prospective) and will (i.e. engagement, aspiration) [table 3]. The three first mentioned are often used as core modalities, the theory behind this is explained in the following quote: “*every produced meaning is always an acceptance of one or another form of existential thesis, intending its intentional object in one or another form of function, delineated by a time horizon*” (Sages et al. 2004, p. 10). All said the process thus allows for the emerging of critical reflection of *how* something is experienced from the uncritical approval of *what* is experienced [table 4].

Table 3.

Modalities and their categories explained

MODALITY	CATEGORIES	EXPLANATION
<i>Belief</i>	Doxa-affirmation	The meaning unit is expressed without any hesitation; being sure of something.
	Doxa-negation	Something is not known for the person.
	Probability	Something is not sure, but probable.
	Possibility	Something is possible.
	Hesitation	The meaning unit is expressed with hesitation.
	Assumption	Something is assumed.
	Question	Something is questioned.
<i>Function</i>	Perceptive	The meaning unit is expressed in a way that does not leave any room for further question. Expression made in concrete terms.
	Signitive	The meaning unit is expressed in a way that leaves room for further questions. Expression made in abstract terms.
	Imaginative	The meaning unit demands imagines of something.
<i>Time</i>	Past	Something took place in the past.
	Present	Something is taking place in the present time.
	Future	Something will take place in the future.
	Present/Past	Something took place in the past but has effects in the present time.
	Present/Future	Something is taking place in the present time, but will have effects in the future.
	Always-Reoccurring	Something is always happening.
	Empty	Something is said without any clue about the time-dimension.
<i>Affect</i>	Positive-Prospective	The meaning unit is expressed with positive affect and is directed to the future.
	Positive-Retrospective	The meaning unit is expressed in a positive affect and is directed to the past.
	Positive-Present	The meaning unit is expressed in a positive affect and is found in present time.
	Neutral	The meaning unit is expressed in a neutral affect or no affect at all.
	Negative-Prospective	The meaning unit is expressed with a negative affect and is directed towards the future.
	Negative-Retrospective	The meaning unit is expressed with a negative affect and is directed to the past.
	Negative-Present	The meaning unit is expressed with a negative affect and is found in the present time.



<i>Will</i>	Engagement	The person that lies behind the meaning unit is talking about something with engagement.
	Non-engagement	The person that lies behind the meaning unit is talking about something without being engaged.
	Aspiration	The meaning unit is expressed in a way that indicates a demanding of something.
	Wish-Positive	The person wishes something to take place.
	Wish-Negative	The person wishes something to not take place.
	None	Nothing is said that indicates any will.
<i>Property</i>	My	Something belongs to “me”.
	Your	Something belongs to “you” (singular).
	His/Her/Its	Something belongs to “him”/“her”/“its”.
	Our	Something belongs to “us”.
	Their	Something belongs to “you” (plural).
	Others	Something belongs to “them”.
	Not stated	Nothing is said about any property.
<i>Subject</i>	I	“I” is the subject in the meaning unit.
	We	“We” is the subject in the meaning unit.
	One-all	Everyone or everyone in a specific context.
	Unspecified	The subject in the meaning unit is not specified.

Table 4.

Example of selection of modalities for a meaning unit

Ex. 1. Meaning Unit	<i>Killing in the bush</i>	
Modalities:	a) Belief: Doxa-affirmation b) Function: Perceptive c) Time: Always-Reoccurring d) Affect: Negative-Present	e) Will: None f) Property: Not stated g) Subject: Unspecified

Ex. 2. Meaning Unit	<i>I feel the abduction has changed my life</i>	
Modalities:	a) Belief: Possibility b) Function: Signitive c) Time: Pres-> Pas d) Affect: Neutral	e) Will: Engagement f) Property: My g) Subject: I

*Stage three: Intentional Analysis*

For the reason that each meaning unit consists to a certain degree of pure, expressed meaning the only way of uncovering the reflexive meaning content, which is found deep inside each individual, is to explore all possible *partial intentions* found in each meaning unit. Therefore the third phase of Minerva is called *intentional analysis*. The idea behind this is found in the writings of Husserl who maintains that every conscious act always takes place in relation to some previously obtained underlying ideas of the transpiring process. These earlier ‘*synthesised*’ objects, as he calls them, are the bases for *passive synthesis*, namely that of one’s preconceptions found in the unreflective, natural attitude, that signify of something that is ‘*already given*’ (Sages & Lahlou 2004, p. 10). In practise then each passive synthesis, which corresponds to a partial intention, is a part of the total meaning and hence needs to be extracted from its meaning unit [table 5]. The extracted partial intentions that are still layered with information are further divided into entities and predicates, the first indicating of something that appears or exists and the latter of the way the entity is expressed, which may include various alternatives [table 5]. In this way by configuring the partial intentions the noematic kernel is brought to light, which together with the modalities of expression can be explored in order to grasp the complete noema [table 6]. Thus it becomes evident that only by forming an understanding of these syntheses, encompassing the entities, their predicates and modalities, one can be directed towards true meaning. Finally it is essential to note that again the process must not be affected by the knowledge or theoretical viewpoint of the analyst, who at the same time needs to consider all partial intentions as equally worthy.

Table 5.

Extracted partial intention with its entity and predicate

Pure meaning: <i>I was helped to escape</i>		
<u>Partial intention:</u>	<u>Entity:</u>	<u>Predicate:</u>
I exist	I	Who exist
One can be helped	Helped	Which one can be
I was helped	I	Who was helped
One can escape	Escape	Which one can do
One can be helped to escape	Escape	Which one can be helped to do
I can escape	I	Who can escape
I was helped to escape	I	Who was helped to escape

Table 6.

Final outlook from the entity pointy of view

ENTITY	CATEGORY	PREDICATE
<i>MODALITY</i>		
+ Eat		
+ Eating		
-- Education		
<i>Belief</i>	Doxa-affirmation	Which exists
<i>Function</i>	Perceptive	Which exists
<i>Time</i>	Past	Which exists
<i>Affects</i>	Negative-Retrospective	Which exists
<i>Will</i>	Engagement	Which exists
<i>Property</i>	My	Which exists
<i>Subject</i>	Unspecified	Which exists
<i>Belief</i>	Doxa-affirmation	Which can be stopped
<i>Function</i>	Perceptive	Which can be stopped
<i>Time</i>	Past	Which can be stopped
<i>Affects</i>	Negative-Retrospective	Which can be stopped
<i>Will</i>	Engagement	Which can be stopped
<i>Property</i>	My	Which can be stopped
<i>Subject</i>	Unspecified	Which can be stopped
+ Effected		
+ End		
+ End up		
+ Enemy		
+Entire		
+Equally		
+ Escape		
+ Escaped		
+ Evening		
+ Eventually		

*c) The Phenomenological Interpretation*

The three stages of MCA create what Husserl calls a *complete noema*, which signifies pure meaning; they not only bring rise to entities, predicates and modalities but also reveal their unique relations. In practical terms a synthesis is done of the results that thereon allows the researcher to create an understanding of the different horizons, which as earlier explained characterise how an individual understands a specific object. In other words each horizon is brought to light by its complete noema, which evidently is found in the analysis of the relations between the modalities of expressions and the noematic kernel. Fundamentally what is unique with the phenomenological interpretation is that it takes the analysis of individual thinking and feeling a step further by aiming at understanding what an individual is looking forward or looking ahead to, and what one's future intentions are. Thus by not solely concentrating on finding out *what* an individual thinks or feels, like several studies based in positivism do, the method is valuable in the sense that it also opens up the time dimension (Sages & Lahlou, 2004).

## Analysis of Results

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### Introduction

The following chapter of the analysis of results is divided into four sections. The first section provides an outlook of the original text that as mentioned before is divided into two categories, time during and after the LRA. Additionally the procedure of selecting relevant material in regards to social relations using Sphinx Lexica is described. In the main the selection entails of forming groups in regards to social relations, the groups however are not confined to the two categories. The second section, which is also based on Sphinx Lexica, consists of further analyses of the group correlations, therefore providing an overview of the whole material being used. This follows the third section that involves a closer analysis of the two categories using Minerva. More precisely for each category this involves both a general view of all modalities, namely how something is experienced, and a more detailed discussion on how and individual understands a specific object, which is generated through syntheseses of dominating entities, their predicates and modalities. Each of these two parts are summarised in order to stress key findings and to clarify the various relations. Finally the fourth section, yet an analysis using Sphinx Lexica, explores particular words and their environments that are shown to dominate in both Minerva and Sphinx Lexica. It is seen as enrichment for the previous knowledge about the group correlations and the detailed syntheseses. In conclusion a comparison of the two groups is presented as a summary of the main findings and all relations of the separate analyses.

### Selection of Material

#### *Outlook of the Original Text*

A short description of the original text consisting of the two categories is presented here in order to give a clear picture of the outlook of the text used. The information is obtained from the contextual summary provided by Sphinx Lexica. In comparison, category one, 'During' consists of slightly more words (4126) than category two, 'After' (2794). Likewise the word frequency is slightly higher in 'During' (198) than in 'After' (121), as well as the number of different words (837 vs. 715). However regarding the richness of the texts, which is configured from the number of unique and exclusive words, both categories show rather similar numbers. Namely concerning unique words the category 'During' contains 306 and 'After' correspondingly 278. Further in regards of exclusive words the difference lies between 465 for 'During' and 373 for 'After'. All in all this

shows that though the text used for the category ‘During’ is slightly longer they both still contain rather equal richness and for this reason are valuable for comparison.

### *Extraction of Material*

The preparatory stage for the analysis of the material is then to discover sentences disclosing forms of social relations. The rationale for extracting relevant material of the text is based on the idea that social relations involve different roles as well as different forms of relationships between people and their social world. More precisely roles, or a social role that symbolises one’s stance in society encompasses an individual’s various behaviours, prerogatives and responsibilities in each social situation. Moreover besides roles social relations consist of diverse connections, actions and interactions between people or spiritual beings, these are comprised of a set of connected mental and physical acts. Based on the characterization of social relations relevant groups are formed to extract sections of the text. The groups that were generated are the following: Role of LRA, Role of child, Role of other (people not living in the bush, i.e. civilians, family members), Negative interaction, Positive interaction, Negative emotional involvement, Positive emotional involvement and finally Spiritual relations. Some examples of the words associated with the different groups are found in the table below [table 7]. It is important to note that each word chosen was confirmed to fit its group through inspection of its environment. Conclusively the extracted text consisted of nearly two thirds of the original material.

Table 7.

Examples of words of each group, written as they appear in the text

Role of LRA	Joseph Kony, Commander(s), LRA, Collaborator, Chief
Role of Child	Abductees, Slaves, Murderer, Watchmen
Role of Other	Parents, Doctor, Neighbours, Elderly, Teacher(s), NGO
Negative interaction	Punished, Ordered, Beat, Arrested, Tortured, Forced
Positive interaction	Advice(d), Help(ed/ing), Shared, Greeted, Welcome(d)
Negative emotional involvement	Afraid, Fail(ure), Hatred, Annoyed, Scared, Deceived
Positive emotional involvement	Trust, Forgiving, Recognised, Respected, Optimistic
Spiritual relations	Prayer, God(s), Church, Holy Spirit, Cleanse

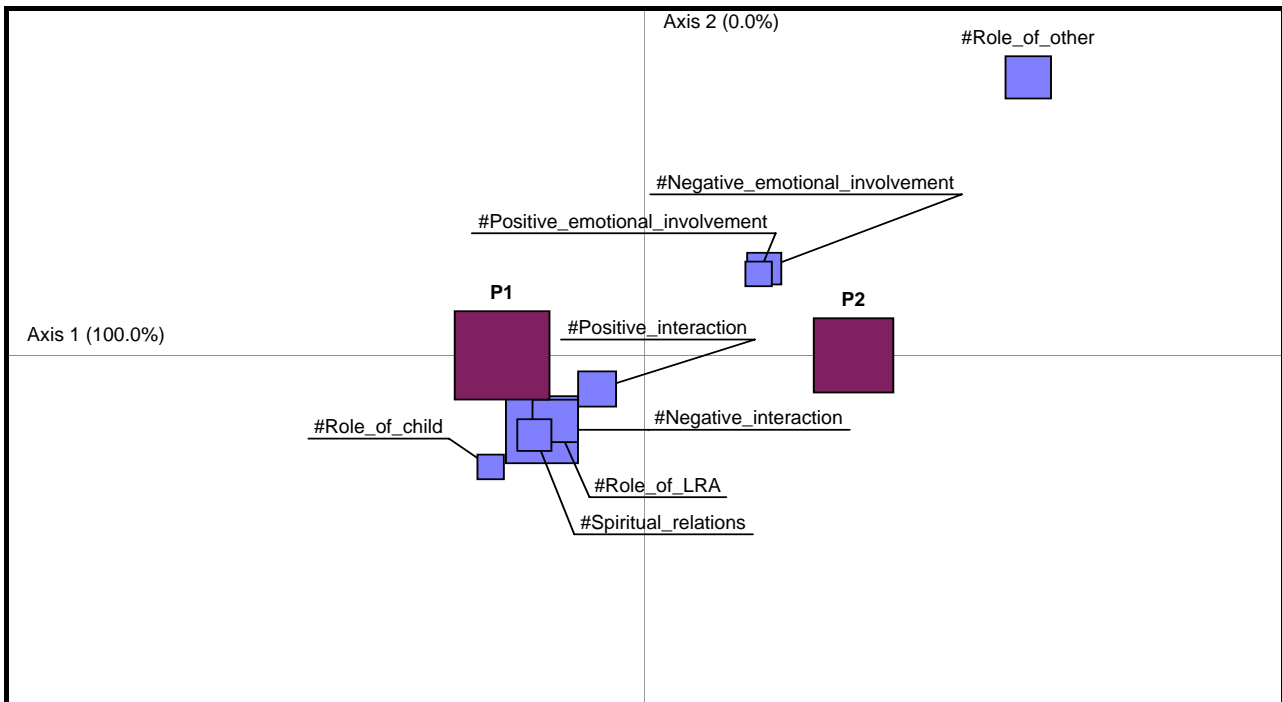
## Analysis of Group Correlations

Based on the formed groups encompassing varied elements of social relations this section provides an overview of the material as a whole by exploration of specific group correlations. The section is constructed in association to the table below that illustrates several notable points [table 8]. What is important to note is that P1 equals the category 'During' LRA and P2 the category 'After' LRA.

The first thing to call attention to is that there are high correlations between the groups 'Role of LRA', 'Negative interaction' as well as 'Spiritual relations'. Especially as 'After' (P2) is rather far from this cluster of groups it becomes evident that 'Negative interaction', which involves not only war like deeds such as killing and arresting, but also more ordinary deeds such as obeying, quarrelling and beating, is mostly part of the bush life. Having said that it can be noted that the group of 'Negative emotional involvement', which consist of words such as scared, fail, hatred, inferior and afraid, is actually closer to time 'After' (P2). This indicates that though much 'Negative interaction' takes place in the bush there is a greater amount of 'Negative emotional involvement' associated to life after the LRA. A second point in regards of the same cluster is the relationship between 'Spiritual relations' and the 'Role of LRA' that evidently indicates that most accounts given of the Holy Spirit also contain some reference to the role of LRA, which consist of words such as controller, chief and Joseph Kony. Furthermore it is interesting to find out that 'Positive interaction', with expressions of help, advised and accepted is closer to time 'During' (P1) than to 'After' (P2), indicating that child combatants show comfort and support to each other while living in the bush and that the times after return they are more lonesome. The two final points to make are the 'Roles of both child' and 'other'. Namely what is astounding is that the 'Role of others' is not really close to neither of the categories 'During' (P1) and 'After' (P2). This demonstrates that though this particular group of words with for instance brother, neighbour, NGO and community has the third highest rate of word frequency in relation to the other groups, it is not in fact close to any form of interaction thus indicating of being at a great distance from the life of child combatants. Lastly the 'Role of children', situated far from life 'After' (P2) LRA shows that when formerly abducted children reflect upon their roles, both before and after, they mostly identity themselves as soldiers, fighters and abductees.

Table 8.

Group correlations



P1: During the time with LRA ('During')  
 P2: After the time with LRA ('After')

Meaning Constitution Analysis

The following section involves a detailed analysis using Minerva. The two categories, during and after life with the LRA are explored in separate. First, a general view of all modalities is provided and second, a more detailed discussion of the specific syntheses of the dominating entities, their predicates and modalities are given. Each of these two parts are summarised in order to clarify the various relations and to stress key findings

*During the time with the LRA*

*a) General view of modalities*

This part presents the complete picture of the modalities for the time during the LRA. This is done in order to comprehend the general idea of how conscious acts are experienced; thus uncovering pure meaning. The findings are also to be compared with the more detailed descriptions of the different entities in the summary.



**Belief:** The absolutely dominant type of belief shown by the interviewees is doxa-affirmation with 66,88%. Considering this and the fact that both hesitation and doxa-negation only show 0,44% it is evident that hardly any uncertainty is expressed. Having said that the category of assumption is 16,56%, thus showing that the former child combatants also theorize and speculate certain things. Moreover a small and equal indication (6,75%) of both possibility and probability exists, thus showing that to some extent the interviewees think of there being a likelihood or chance of something happening. This is seen in situations regarding rules in the bush where for instance one is not always sure if one's actions are to be punished or not. Finally there are a few (2,18%) meaning units showing question such as: *"I started to think: are we really fighting a normal war?"*, and *"But if you are killing the same people, whom are we going to rule?"* These quotes demonstrate that some of the children are not quite aware of the reasons for fighting, yet at the same time they also indicate an active stance of questioning the rationale of the war and social order.

**Function:** As regards to function there is a very even divide between perceptive (44,23%) and signitive (42,27%) meaning units. On one hand many of the statements are rather descriptive and detailed, especially on the topic of actions and procedures in the bush, yet on the other hand just as many meaning units are expressed in abstract terms leaving room for further questioning. Interestingly there is also 13,51% of the meaning units expressing imaginative function such as the following quote: *"I thought people were in sort of a prison"*, thus demonstrating of something ideated.

**Time:** As the statements are all about the interviewees past time with the LRA it is of no surprise that 61,22% of the meaning units are expressed with reference to the past. Also a relatively high number (16,99%) is shown for being empty thus demonstrating that much of what is said has no indication of time but simply of something that happens, which can be seen as a sign of things being natural and normal. Similarly suggestions of things always-recurring show 6,10%, which as well demonstrates that there are certain things that continuously occur in the bush. Hardly any indication (2,18%) is shown of future thinking hence illustrating that the time in the bush is experienced as here and now with future as an unknown and distant thing.

**Affect:** Interestingly the principal affect is neutral with 49,89%. This shows that often the interviewees speak about their time in the bush neither with a positive nor negative tone, indicating of things simply being as they are. At the same time however there are several units, namely 24,18%, that are negative retrospective thus demonstrating that life in the bush is sometimes sad and depressing. On the contrary however what is heartening is that 17,63% of the meaning units

show positive-retrospective affect, thus revealing that there are also times the children are able to get pleasure from their stay while feeling comforted and loved. Finally not much affect, neither negative (1,96%) nor positive (1,53%) is prospective, again indicating of hardly any feelings regarding the future.

**Will:** Though the persons talking are both involved and uninvolved in the discussions there is a great dominance of engagement with 50,33% versus 14,60% (un-engagement). This shows that the interviewees talk about personal experiences and are hence very much part of the narratives. Second however, is that of no will with 25,93% which reflects the submissive stance of the former child combatants. Also though surprisingly low, yet noteworthy is that 3,92% of the meaning units demonstrate aspiration hence pointing to there being some sort of requesting and commanding. Whereas wish negative is quite low with 1,96%, a similar amount (3,27%) of meaning units, as for aspiration, are found for wish positive, hence demonstrating that there are certain parts that indicate that a person shows hope and optimism for something to happen.

**Property:** Highest property expressed, with 70,43%, is found in regards to the category of not stated, which could be for the reason that not much is expressed in terms of belonging to someone or something. Apart from feelings and friends there is not much that is of one's own in the bush. This follows a rather equal amount of property stated as his (3,70%), my (4,14%), their (5,54%) and our (3,27%) where interestingly her is only of 0,65% thus stressing a possible minority of women.

**Subject:** In regards of social relations the modalities of subject are of specific importance. Here it shows that though the majority (52,07%) of the meaning units are unspecified the divide between I, with 29,42% and We, with 17,43% is rather interesting. Indeed remarkable in the way that they are both very equal but with I still dominating, thus showing that both subjective and group viewpoints exist but that individual perspective to some extent overlooks the collective.

#### *b) Synthesis of dominating entities*

The next part of the analysis is where a synthesis is done of several entities, their predicates and modalities, which evidently uncovers the different horizons, which as earlier explained characterise how an individual understands a specific object. In other words it is here the complete noema is brought to light by analysis of the relations between the noematic kernel and the modalities of expression. The analysis was commenced by selection of entities, which was done according to the number of times they were mentioned in the text; the most dominating entities were selected, thus prohibiting any bias by the researcher. However, with the exception of excluding the entities You,

He and She that were considered as often used in either imaginative ('if you do not') or third person indications of people. The following entities showed domination in the given order: I (Me), We (Us), They (Rebels and Commanders), People and Holy Spirit. Here it is important to point out that though the entities are not chosen, some of them are grouped for the reason that their representations are comparable. Nevertheless they all are the most frequent. For the actual analysis encompassing predicates and their modalities, yet again the dominating predicates were selected; in most cases those that occurred more than one time and exceptionally in the case of I, and We, those that occurred more than two times.

### Entity I

Who would follow	Who was forced	Who was told	Who told
Who started seeing/feeling	Who realized	Who was young	

As mentioned earlier the entity I, which reflects existence of oneself, is expressed in numerous ways, yet given that the predicates above appear more than two times they are arguably strong indications of how a former child combatant views himself or herself during the time with the LRA. Firstly it can be noted that there are very strong expressions of confinement where one is 'told' or 'forced' and conversely where one obediently 'follows'. Seeing that both expressions of 'told' and 'forced' are stated in concrete terms (perceptive) and without hesitation (doxa-affirmation) it shows that one remembers and is in no doubt of the orders that were given. Similarly expressions of 'follow' are doxa-affirmation and perceptive, yet also put across as probable thus indicating that at times 'following' is not as definite. Further what is worthy to note is that all expressions of both 'told' and 'follow' show neutral affect whereas 'forced' always comes across as negative-retrospective, thus indicating that experiences of being told and having to follow are more tolerated than being compelled to act. Moreover there are also expressions of one being the one who 'told' other people, which also show certainty (doxa-affirmation) as well as engagement. More importantly as these expressions carry a neutral affect they are not an indication of something forced but rather some sort of assimilation of authoritarian behaviour. Moreover the given predicates show that despite one having to follow other people's orders a child combatant still holds the mind-set of questioning, analysing and configuring, which is seen in the expressions of 'started seeing', 'started feeling' as well as 'who realized'. Though surprisingly the expression have no positive or negative connotation they are put across without hesitation (doxa-affirmation) again indicating of certainty, as opposed to something assumed, probable or possible. Finally there are

expressions of being ‘young’ which indicates that though circumstances may not allow for typical child like actions such as play, in many cases a child combatant still understands that he or she is young. Nevertheless it needs to be noted that it does not necessarily mean that he or she views himself or herself as a child, this does not come across in the given expressions of I. Regarding affect the expressions show negative-retrospective, in other words being in the bush while still young is not a positive memory.

**Entity We (Us)**

Who would win the war	Who would overthrow	Who were told
Who told	Who used to pray	Who shared

The first two predicates, ‘who would win the war’ and ‘who would overthrow’ are very much interlinked as they both express a joint effort and wish to bring down the government. However in regards of the modality belief it is interesting to note that to ‘win the war’ is solely possible or probable, whereas to ‘overthrow’ the government is either stated without hesitation (doxa-affirmation) or assumed to happen. This indicates that a child combatant, who “physically” takes part in the war every day, is more realistic about it than of the deed of overthrowing the government. Namely while the war is seen as a battle one possibly can win, overthrowing the government, which as a concept might be rather abstract and distant, is simply thought to happen. What is more is that while the predicates of ‘winning the war’ are always stated with positive affect the predicates of ‘overthrow’, though bearing some positive affect, also show neutrality and even negative affect. This further shows that at the end of the day winning the war is a joyful thought for the child, whereas causing the downfall of the government is for some positive, some indifferent and others a distressful thought. Likewise to above the predicates ‘were told’ and ‘who told’ are all stated with assurance (doxa-affirmation) and tangible descriptions (perceptive), hence implying of the expressions being stated near to fact. Also again the expressions of ‘who told’ are neutral thus indicating of mirroring behaviour of other, more powerful people. Concerning the predicates of ‘shared’ and ‘prayed’, these collective acts expectedly both reflect positive memories. This said however there are a few predicates of ‘prayed’ that also show affect of negative-retrospective, which is a sign of prayer also being used in times of suffering.

### Entity They (Rebels, Commanders)

Who say	Who promised	Who beat
Who can give rank	Who did ritual	Who will overthrow

The third synthesis of the entity ‘They’ show expressions of both verbal communication with ‘say’ and ‘promised’ and non-verbal action with ‘beat’, ‘give rank’ and ‘did ritual’. Though again many more different expressions are found these are the most common ones. On the topic of verbal communication, expressions of ‘say’ show doxa-affirmation made in both concrete (perceptive) and abstract (signitive) terms, while conversely expressions of ‘promised’ only show possibility and function of imagination. What is more is that the expressions of ‘say’ show engagement with the child (I) always as the subject being spoken to; this is not shown with expressions of ‘promised’. Altogether this indicates that at the same time as things are said clearly and straightforwardly promises are only thoughts of likelihood. Both groups however reflect affect of negative-retrospective, as well as neutrality for ‘say’, hence implying of a great amount of verbal communication with ‘them’ being upsetting. With reference to non-verbal action it can be noted that expressions of ‘beat’, ‘give rank’ and ‘did ritual’, though rather unlike to content, are all put across as doxa-affirmation and perceptive. The only difference being that expressions of ‘beat’ that are always intended for the subject I are experienced with negative affect, whereas expressions of ‘give rank’ and ‘did ritual’, that do not show any specific subject, are put across as neutral. This simply indicates that both acts of giving rank and performing rituals are often not done in private, and do not bring about any strong feelings; again they basically just happen. Finally expressions of ‘will overthrow’ the government show somewhat similar reflection as in the case of ‘we’, namely with doxa-affirmation and assumption, but regarding affect the expressions are only put across as positive, thus indicating that as the government will be overthrown by someone else, in this case ‘they’, it shows positive thinking as the likelihood of it happening might be thought as greater.

### Entity People

Whom one can kill	Who can be important	Who was sending greetings of peace
Who helped me	Who are in camps	Who can be abducted

The entity ‘people’ is in all probability the most controversial of all entities found during the time with the LRA. Broadly speaking the expressions refer to doings, feeling as well as place. Firstly there are expressions of ‘who one can kill’ which are put across as pure statements (doxa-

affirmation) in concrete terms (perceptive) and notably, seen as either past or always-recurrent in regards to time. Knowing this and adding the fact that they are being expressed in either neutral, or at times, in negative-present affect it is evident that the idea of people ‘whom one can kill’ is worryingly casual, easy, disengaging and somewhat dull to senses. Having said that the second set of expressions where people are seen as someone ‘who can be important’, put across as involvement (engagement) and positive affect, it is clear that just as much they are seen as objects of target they are also seen as significant fellow human beings. However it should be stated that the belief in the expressions of ‘who can be important’ are not that of doxa-affirmation but possibility, thus indicating of likelihood, not certainty. Nonetheless the following two groups of expressions, namely that of ‘who helped me’ and ‘who was sending greeting of peace’ both shown with certainty (doxa-affirmation), engagement and affect of positive-retrospective imply of confidence and belief in good will of other people. A final add to the general view that a child combatant has on people is found in the expressions of ‘who are in camps’ and ‘who can be abducted’. As put across without hesitation (doxa-affirmation), as an actuality (perceptive) and with no affection (neutrality) this shows that one believes that without a doubt the reality of people’s life in general is that anyone can be abducted and that many people live in one of the several camps in northern Uganda.

**Entity Holy Spirit**

Which exists	Which talked through
Which came one	Which has power over

The last entity in the category of during the time with the LRA represents spirituality. Firstly there are expressions of simply ‘which exists’ that are at all occasions put across as doxa-affirmation and as perceptive with neutral effect, which together demonstrates that the fact that the Holy Spirit exists does not bring about either distressing or pleasant feelings. Correspondingly there are expressions of the Holy Spirit being active, such as ‘which talked through’ and ‘which came on’, despite the fact that many of them show engagement they are put across with neutral affect, thus implying that even when it is active and one is involved the Holy Spirit has little affect on the person. Having said that there is the final group of expressions of ‘which has power’ that are put across with the belief of assumption and as something that is always-recurring, while reflecting feelings of negativity. This demonstrates that many of the children imagine that the Holy Spirit has some sort of influence and control, which constantly is present and thus can never be escaped.

### *c) Summary of Findings*

The summary is set to bring across the most significant findings of both the general view of modalities and the separate syntheses of the different entities. As maintained earlier in the general view of modalities the most significant as well as dominant types of modalities ‘during’ the time with the LRA are belief with doxa-affirmation (66,88%), affect with neutral (49,89%) and will with engagement (50,33%). This also comes across in many of the separate entities where the interviewees speak about their time in the bush with certainty and engagement, in neither a positive nor negative tone, indicating of things simply being as they are. Also though perceptive (44,23) and signitive (42,27%) functions show high percentages, mostly expressions of detailed (perceptive) accounts are shown. As it seems the former child combatants express themselves very similarly as both individuals and as a group. Namely both entities ‘I’ and ‘We’ reflect assured, engaged and tangible expressions of demands such as ‘told’ or ‘forced’ and alternatively of acts of obeying such as ‘follow’. Additionally they also reflect that of, ‘told’ other people’. All expressions are put across with affect of neutral or negative retrospective. Thus all together it shows that former child combatants, either as ‘I’ or ‘We’, show distress, neutrality and certainty of a lot of verbal communication. Finally what is particular with the entity ‘We’ is that of assumed expressions of ‘overthrowing the government’ as well as of positive affect of ‘sharing’ and ‘praying’, thus indicating of both joint belief and mutual care.

Moreover the experiences expressed by the former child combatants of ‘They’, encompassing ‘Rebels and Commanders’, involve certainty of ‘saying’, ‘performing ritual’, ‘beating’ and ‘giving rank’, where only ‘beating’ and additionally ‘promising’ bear negative connotation, the rest reflected as neutral. People again are put across both positively as someone ‘helping’ and ‘sending greetings of peace’ and neutrally as ‘whom one can kill’. Altogether indicating that though people can be seen as significant fellow human beings, killing them is casual, and somewhat dull to senses. Finally the Holy Spirit is expressed with certainty as ‘existing’. It is assumed to ‘have power’ and act ‘through talking’, which indicates that many of the interviewees imagine that the Holy Spirit has some sort of influence and control, which at sometimes is frightening and other times not.

### *After the time with the LRA*

#### *a) General view of modalities*

**Belief:** Similarly to the time during LRA the interviewees show high numbers (53,97%) in doxa-affirmation and correspondingly low, if not even indistinguishable, in doxa-negation (0,55%), and

hesitation (0,27%). This again demonstrates that the former child combatants come across as very confident and sure about their sayings. What is attention grabbing is that 19,45% of the meaning units express possibility, which shows that there are rather many things in their life after the time with the LRA that indicate likelihood, with either positive, negative or neutral affect. Also assumption is equally high with 17,81%, demonstrating that quite a few matters are presupposed or taken for granted. A final category that is noteworthy to point out is that of probability with 6,58% that shows that though one is not sure about certain things to take place, the chance of something happening is still present.

**Function:** Regarding function the meaning units are mostly expressed in abstract, indefinite terms; 44,38% are signitive. However not extremely far off is the function of perceptive (34,79%) thus indicating that nearly just as many meaning units are put across in concrete terms leaving no room for further questioning. What is also fascinating is that even the third category of imaginative is rather high with 20,55%, which shows that quite a few things are pictured in one's mind and spoken hypothetically. The following quote exemplifies such extracts: *"they tell him he is a rebel and when he grows up he will also become a rebel"*.

**Time:** Despite that fact that the accounts are all about the time after the LRA the highest number of meaning units, 37,53%, still point towards the past. Having said that, again almost an equal amount (28,77%) is expressed in present time, thus implying that even though the times in the bush are still very much part of the daily life, a present exists. Moreover a great deal (11,23%) of the meaning units are put across without a sense of time, and more importantly 12,33% show of something always-reoccurring. Future is only expressed 2,47% times.

**Affect:** The theme affect is significant in the sense that it can give a rough idea of the general feelings after life with the LRA. Here one can see that interestingly the dominating affect that is put across is neutral with 49,86%, indicating indifference. Thereon it can be noted that distressing and sad feelings are expressed to a great extent, namely with 21,10% showing negativity in the present and 13,97% in relation to the past. However only 2,74% of negative feelings are expressed regarding the future. On the subject of pleasant and joyful feelings most are expressed in association to the past (6,30%), some to the present (4,66%) and only a few to the future (1,10%).

**Will:** In their accounts of life after the LRA the former child combatants show both strong indication of engagement (55,62%), as well as un-engagement (21,25%) or none (13,70%). This



demonstrates that they are often involved and have a connection with the topic under discussion, yet that they also take distance and discusses matters as an onlooker. Finally there is hardly any indication of aspiration (1,92%), positive (1,92%) and negative (1,37%) wishful thinking, thus demonstrating that there are not many thoughts of demand or yearning.

**Property:** In regards to property the markedly dominating category is that of not stated with 66,58%, which is similar to the time during captivity, and again illustrating that the given accounts do not stress belongingness of things. Nevertheless rather high numbers of property is shown as my (17,26%), as opposed to their (6,58%), his, others (2,74%), ours (2,74%).

**Subject:** Also the subject in the narratives is most often unspecified with 56,44%, yet with I as reasonably strong with 37,26%. What is interesting is that ‘we’ is very low after the time with the LRA with only 5,48%. This indicates that the interviewees express themselves seldom in collective terms and more so as individuals.

*b) Synthesis of dominating entities*

The following part consists yet again of syntheses done of several entities, their predicates and modalities; the complete noema is uncovered through analysis of the relations between the noematic kernel and the modalities of expression. In their given order, the following entities show domination after time with the LRA: I, We (Us), They (People), Home (House), Friends and Family (Mother and Parents).

**Entity I**

Who feels unhappy	Who was happy	Who gets annoyed/aggressive
Who thinks about them/what happened	Who should go visit	Who wants to/tries to fight

As it seems most of the expressions in relation to the entity I associate to some form of feelings, especially to that of happiness. At first it comes across that at present time I (subject) ‘feel unhappy’, though stated with certainty (doxa-affirmation) and as involved the subject nevertheless leaves it open for further questioning (signitive). This indicates that the feelings of unhappiness are relatively intangible, nevertheless their existence is definite. On the contrary there are positive feelings of ‘happiness’, also expressed with certainty (doxa-affirmation), engagement and with both signitive and perceptive functions, but this time as directed to the past, which can be related to times of being released and returning home. Yet other expressions of feelings that occur often in association to I is

‘gets annoyed’ and ‘gets aggressive’, which both are put across without hesitation, also as engaged and made in concrete (perceptive) and abstract (signitive) terms. What is interesting here is that the notions of getting annoyed and aggressive that bear negative connotation, take place in the present time but are shown to be effected by the past, which demonstrates that the subject (I) is aware of the source of his or her irritation and anger. Speaking of the past also the predicate ‘think about them/what happened’ showing certainty (doxa-affirmation), engagement and signitive function, indicate strong relation to the past, of which some are always-reoccurring. The slight difference however between expressions of ‘thinks about them’ and ‘thinks about what happened’ is that when discussing ‘them’ the feelings are put across as neutral, whereas when discussing ‘what happened’ they are always negative-retrospective, hence showing that ‘they’ simply exist but what ‘happened’ is not indifferent. Moreover the predicate ‘should visit’ comes across as something that is possible yet imagined. As these expressions all indicate of negative emotions in the present time it is evident that the subject (I) has the ability to imagine opportunity yet simultaneously not feeling good about it. Finally the entity I show expressions of ‘who wants to/tries to fight’ where again it is imagined as a possibility with either negative or neutral affect. This all sounds reasonable but what is noteworthy here is that the subject (I) who wishes to fight or tries to fight associates the action with the past and in particular with them.

**Entity We (Us)**

Who easily kills	Who had to go through same	Who are/were happy
Who trusted each other	Who stayed together	

The following entity we encompasses a lot of varied expressions of both positive and negative affects. What is striking is that all of them, though spoken in regards of doings in present time, reflect to the past, thus pointing to the fact that the interviewees still consider ‘we’ as the group of former child combatants. That is, no other ‘we’ is present in their life. To exemplify, the expressions of for instance ‘who easily kills’ that are assumed and imagined as an always-reoccurring act show that even in present time this is understood as the characteristics of a former child combatant. Nevertheless the expressions are always put across with a negative undertone thus implying of sad feelings in relation to ‘we’, as former child combatants. Furthermore the entity ‘we’ is also expressed as ‘who had to go through same’, which when put across with certainty (doxa-affirmation), neutral affect and aspiration indicates of something shared which therefore unites the group even at present time. Regarding positive retrospective feelings the two predicates ‘who were

happy’ and ‘who trusted’, expressed without hesitation, show that reliance and joy experienced together in the bush has formed a strong tie that is still recalled in days after life with the LRA. Similarly the predicate ‘stayed together’ is expressed with doxa-affirmation in perceptive function but unlike with expressions of ‘who were happy’ and ‘who trusted’ they are disclosed in a neutral way thus demonstrating that even togetherness is at times just the way it is.

**Entity They (People)**

Who can murder	Who one can have killed	Who tease	Who insult
Who call me a rebel	Who feels inferior	Who doubted	Who encouraged

A very first thing that one notices in the way that the former child combatants show expressions in regards of ‘they’ and ‘people’ is found in the predicate ‘who can murder’. This for the reason that the word murder, that is often not associated with soldiers, is new in comparison to anything expressed in earlier accounts. In any case the predicate is at all times put across as either a possibility or assumption and interestingly as always-reoccurring. Thus together with the affects that are shown as neutral or negative this signifies that the interviewee(s) believe that people in general are capable of murder, which they either feel sad or indifferent about. This said it is remarkable to notice that ‘they’ and ‘people’ are also expressed, without hesitation, as ‘whom one can have killed’, which indicates that unquestionably one is aware of the earlier “enemies”. As the expression are always put across with negative affect this can be seen as a sign of sorrow and remorse. The following three predicates ‘who tease’, ‘who insult’ and ‘who call me a rebel’ are all forms of verbal abuse, which for their similarity thus comes across as a dominant category in regards of the entity ‘they’ and ‘people’. What shows as a similarity in all three cases is that they are expressed with negative connotation and always as reoccurring. While ‘who tease’ is put across as imagined and a possibility of happening, both ‘who insult’ and ‘who call me a rebel’ are expressed as certain (doxa-affirmation) and factual (perceptive) phenomenon. This said it is evident that ‘they’ and ‘people’ are both assumed to be, and seen to be, a distress in regards to verbal abuse. What is more is that the two predicates of ‘feels inferior’ and ‘who doubted’, both expressed with negative nuance, are also put across as something assumed. This shows that some of the former child combatants believe that ‘they’ or ‘people’ see them as lesser and distrusted, which brings about feelings of sadness. Finally expressions of ‘who encouraged’ are disclosed with definiteness, engagement as well as in positive retrospective, which demonstrates that to some degree comfort and support are related to ‘they’ and ‘people’.

### Entity Home (House)

Which I could not enter	Where one can stay
Which one can come back to	Which is our

The entity ‘home’, sometimes referred to as house, show somewhat contradicting expressions. First of all ‘home’ is referred to a place ‘which I could not enter’, which disclosed without hesitation (doxa-affirmation) in negative retrospective simply demonstrates that one is not welcomed in one’s own home, which clearly is heartbreaking. On the contrary both predicates of ‘where one can stay’ and ‘which one can come back to’ that are stated with certainty in a descriptive (perceptive) manner show that home can also be a safe and welcoming place. However as the expressions are given as neutral it reflects that one does not associate great joy or sadness with the entity. Conclusively it is interesting to see that ‘home’ is also simply expressed as ‘which is our’, which when put across with neutral affect and as assumption demonstrates that ‘home’ is also just something that belongs to someone, a place, that again, does not bring about any strong feelings.

### Entity Friends

Who are mine	Who I used to visit
Who one can be with	

In regards to the entity ‘friends’ there are only three sets of expressions found in the text. The first one, ‘who are mine’ are communicated and described as something that is definite (doxa-affirmation) and very concrete (perceptive). Though described with positive or sometimes neutral affect they are nevertheless always directed to the past, thus implying that something that is still seen as friendship is only discussed in reference to the past. Likewise the expressions of ‘who I used to visit’, also put across with certainty (doxa-affirmation) and descriptive details (perceptive), are all seen as positive phenomenon in the past, yet at this time as something that creates negative feelings in present, thus implying that a former child combatant feels sad for having become detached from something that used to be joyful. In contrast the entity ‘friends’ is also disclosed as someone ‘who one can be with’, which expressed in abstract terms (signitive), neutral affect and perceived as a possibility show that the option of being amongst friends is known to exist yet seen with disinterest.

### Entity Family (Mother, Parents)

Who greeted me	Who were the only ones
Who was killed	

The final entity in the category of life after the LRA is ‘family’, which encompasses the entities mother and parents. The reason for grouping these three entities is that they are all somewhat dominant after the above mentioned, and thus seen as vital to include in the analysis, though as a group. First expression in regards to ‘family’ is that of ‘who greeted me’, which are put across without hesitation (doxa-affirmation), as something concrete (perceptive) and with positive affect directed to the past. This expression that further shows engagement implies that ‘family’ is associated with cheerful thoughts that one can feel part of. Thereon ‘family’ is also expressed as they ‘who were the only ones’, which again disclosed with certainty, concreteness yet with negative feelings directed towards the past show that discussing ‘family’ can also awaken negative feelings. Finally the tragic predicate of ‘who was killed’ that is put across as something one is certain of and that reflects negative affect indicates that yet again ‘family’ is associated to distressful emotions.

#### *c) Summary of Findings*

Similarly to the earlier summary of time during life with the LRA this part is set to bring across the most significant findings in both the general view of modalities and the separate syntheses of the different entities. Once again the highest number of belief is shown as doxa-affirmation (53,97%) as well as past regarding time (37,53%). Though neutrality is dominant in the general view (49,86%), much positive and negative affect is shown in the varied entities. The entity ‘I’ mostly involve expressions of feelings such as being happy, unhappy, aggressive and annoyed, which though stated with certainty are very often not described in concrete terms. Interestingly expressions that bear negative connotation, in particular that of ‘annoyed’, ‘aggressive’ and ‘thinking about what happened’ are always directed towards the past, which thus show to be the core source for one’s sadness and irritation. Furthermore though the subject ‘We’ show low percentage (5,48%) in the general view of modalities quite a few expressions are found. Strikingly all reflect to the past, thus pointing to the fact that the interviewees still consider ‘we’ as the group of former child combatants. On one hand ‘we’ is identified as, us ‘who easily kill’ and us ‘who had to go through same’ yet on the other hand ‘we’ is also reflected as ‘who were happy’ and ‘who trusted’. What is important to note is that the little positive affect (6,30% past; 4,66% present) that is shown is in regards to the entities ‘We’ and ‘Family’.

Expressed with negative connotation and always as reoccurring in regards to ‘They’ (‘People’) involve acts of ‘teasing’, ‘insulting’ and ‘calling one a rebel’. Interestingly not much is however stated with certainty but as something possible or assumed. This includes for instance ‘tease’, ‘who doubted’ and ‘feels inferior’. All in all it is evident that ‘they’ and ‘people’ are both assumed to be, and seen to be, a great distress in regards to verbal abuse. The entity ‘Home’ (‘House’) is not expressed in harmony, namely it is either reflected as a place ‘where one can stay’ or as ‘the place I could not enter’. What is notable is that distress that is put across in present time is mostly related to ‘Home’. Finally both ‘Family’ (‘Mother’ and ‘Parents’) and ‘Friends’ are expressed as either a certainty or possibility, but always with mixed emotions. Especially ‘Friends’ are expressed in very varied ways such as with distressful recalling ‘who I used to visit’ or as possibility ‘who one can be with’. ‘Family’ again, show reflection of happiness in ‘who greeted me’ but also of negative memories with ‘who were killed’.

### Analysis of word Dominance

The final section of analysis using Sphinx Lexica is set to explore particular words that dominate in both Minerva and Sphinx Lexica. With some of the words the environments are analyzed in order to avoid assuming. The purpose of the analysis is to further supplement previous findings. The words that were found dominating and significant are shown in the lexical cross table below [table 9].

Table 9.

Lexical Cross Table

WORD	DURING	AFTER	TOTAL		WORD	DURING	AFTER	TOTAL
I	172	192	364		Friends	4	8	12
We	109	24	133		Young	8	0	8
Me	49	51	100		Parents	1	7	8
They	56	33	89		Insult	0	7	7
People	26	20	46		Rank	6	0	6
Us	34	11	45		Everybody	4	1	5
Government	14	0	14		Group	5	0	5

#### *Word Dominance - During life with LRA*

At first the usage of ‘We’ and ‘Us’ are almost five and three times as common when discussing life during as opposed to after the LRA. This follows with just as drastic figures, though in smaller

quantities, for the usage of the words 'Everybody' and 'Group'. By inspecting the environment for the usage of these two words it shows that 'Everybody' is most often expressed in relation to the group of abductees where for instance everybody "struggles to get rank" or "everybody had to tie their arms". The word 'Group' also reflects at times the abductees, which is exemplified by "the group newly abducted" yet at other times the whole army which can be noted in "the group was waiting to attack". All in all however it can be concluded that expression of collectiveness and group cohesion is very strong during the time with the LRA. Moreover what is rather thought provoking is the usage of the word government, which appears 14 times when spoken in regards to times during the LRA and null times in relation to the time after. Exploring the environment for this particular word shows that government is solely used in the context of overthrowing it. The interesting thing is that the belief varies from one extreme to the other, with "would have, could have and will not" as examples. In general then, this demonstrates that the importance of mentioning the government is near to insignificant after leaving the LRA. Furthermore expressing the word 'Young' is also extremely more common when discussing life during the LRA. From the analysis of the environment it shows that the word 'Young' is mostly mentioned in the contexts of oneself or others being too young to be part of the rebel force. The following quotes demonstrate this conclusion: "I was still young but they were teaching me to use the gun", "I was still young and not ready for sex" and "the other soldiers, the young one's". This said it is evident that the word 'Young' indicates that the child combatants are somewhat aware of the role of children and adolescence. Finally the word 'Rank' is brought up six times during the LRA yet not mentioned a single time after it. The word itself is in all occasions put across as something that is "being given" or that one is "striving to get"; it is purely used in regards of something aspired.

#### *Word Dominance - After life with the LRA*

The word that shows great dominance in the time after the LRA is that of 'Parents'. By looking at the surroundings of the word it gives the idea that parents are related with one main thing, namely one's return. This is exemplified with the following quotes: "who welcomed me", "who ran away when they saw me" and "my parents took me home". Equally as dominant word is 'Insult', which is interesting in the sense that each sentence shows reference to somebody different, either insulting, such as "elderly people" and "children" or who is being insulted, such as "my child", or who does not insult, such as "formerly abducted". Finally the third dominant word in the category of after the LRA is 'Friends', which is seen to have rather varied surroundings. Namely there is indication of "visiting friends", "not meeting friends", "being with friends", "I used to have friends" as well as

“you cannot tell friends”. From this one can gather that having, being or seeing friends varies greatly between the former child combatants.

#### *Word Dominance – Equal in both Groups*

In this category it is possible to notice that the usage of ‘I’ and ‘Me’, which earlier discussed using MCA, are rather equally presented in both during and after the LRA, thus showing that expressing thought in subject, I, is identical whether speaking of life here and now or life in the bush. Next, it can be noted that both the usage of the words ‘They’ and ‘People’ appear evenly in both categories, which demonstrates that the former child combatants refer to both words regardless of the time.

#### Summary of all Findings

In order to conclude the chapter of analysis it is essential to shed light on the similarities and differences of the subjective expressions regarding time during and after the LRA. At first it is evident that many of the dominating modalities in both categories are rather similar. Namely in general more than half of the meaning units in both categories are expressed with confidence (doxa-affirmation), engagement, neutrality and with function as either perceptive or signitive. Thus it can be argued that the former child combatants are most often involved, and in no doubt of their accounts that they give with neutral affect, in either descriptive or abstract terms. Additionally many things are assumed in both categories, yet only after time with the LRA do many of the matters indicate possibility.

‘I’ and ‘We’ during the LRA are put across in incredibly similar ways, both reflecting assured, engaged and tangible expressions of demands such as ‘told’ or ‘forced’ and alternatively of acts of obeying such as ‘follow’. In contrast ‘I’ as an individual after the LRA is expressed with feelings of being happy, unhappy, aggressive and annoyed. This said it is fascinating to note the divide between ‘I’ and ‘We’, as the subjects expressed in the meaning units, is nearly equal during the LRA, but extremely uneven, with ‘We’ as almost invisible, in time after the LRA. This is reassured with the findings from Sphinx Lexica that show that the usage of the word ‘We’ is almost five times as common when discussing life during the LRA, as opposed to after. As the interviewees express themselves seldom in collective terms after the LRA, and the few times they do they reflect to the past, it can be argued that they still consider ‘We’ as the group of former child combatants. Likewise the group correlations illustrate how the ‘Role of children’ is nearest to time during LRA, which indicates that all in all former child combatants use a lot of terms that are associated with the LRA when referring to themselves.



As maintained earlier both categories express neutral and negative affect to a great extent. Illustrated by both Sphinx Lexica and Minerva distress, sadness and disinterest is shown in relation to both verbal communication and negative interaction during the LRA, but solely to verbal abuse after. In comparison, during the LRA this involves forcing, promising and beating by authoritarian figures, whereas after the LRA it takes the form of insults, teasing and doubting that is performed by community members and peers. The difference here is that of not only what is done but by whom. What is thought provoking is that most of the abuse after the LRA is reflected as something that is possible or assumed, as well as always-reoccurring. Finally, a great deal of positive affect is also shown during the LRA with expressions of helping, sharing and praying, and interestingly the little that is shown in regards to the time after the LRA is expressed in association to the past. However, having said that, also many of the negative emotions in present time are associated to the past.

Concerning other people there are great differences to what is indicated during and after the LRA. Most expressions made during the LRA involve them, such as rebels or commanders whereas after the LRA much indication is found in regards of family members, home and friends. People during the LRA are experienced with positive connotation in regards to for instance helping and with neutral affect as in someone that one can kill. On the contrary people after the LRA, are expressed with both positive and negative feelings where 'Family' and 'Home' are indicated as welcoming and non-welcoming, and 'Friends' as who one can be with or who one used to have. Thus it is evident that having, being or seeing family and friends varies greatly between the former child combatants. Finally what is worthy to note is that during the LRA both government and Holy Spirit were mentioned several times, but hardly at all, in fact regarding government never, after the LRA. Government that is always mentioned in the context of overthrowing show varied beliefs from one extreme to another, with "would have, could have and will not" as examples. In general then, this demonstrates that as a concept it is rather distant and the importance of mentioning it is near to insignificant after leaving the LRA. Additionally the Holy Spirit is strongly seen to be related to the role of the LRA; it is believed to exist and have power thus being able to influence and control people.

## Discussion

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### Introduction

The following chapter is set to discuss the most relevant findings of the research conducted on the challenges of roles and relations of former child combatants in Uganda. It is thus a comprehensive review of the analysis of the results as well as of previous findings. The chapter is divided into five sections, of which the three first reflect upon different form of relations in terms of theory and practice. More precisely the first one is set to shed light on how former child combatants perceive themselves in relation to others. Thereon the second one on how they express themselves in collective terms and finally the third one presents their expressions of relations to others concerning people in general, family and peers. Thereafter future implications in regards to research are presented and conclusively limitations of the research are discussed.

### Who am I and what is expected from me?

In reference to Heidegger's notion of *Mitda-sein* (being with), it is crucial to underline that it is a fundamental part of *Dasein* ('I'); plurality is embedded in one's consciousness and explored as part of 'I'. Furthermore as maintained earlier self-concept in Ugandan culture is to a great extent defined according to relationships. Altogether then the perception of oneself is seen as extremely relevant to discuss in terms of social relations and roles. A child combatant in Uganda generally perceives himself/herself very differently during the time with the LRA and after. The main reasons for this are clearly growth together with the extreme difference of social context. A child who is abducted, or in some cases willingly joins the LRA, is seen to be living a vulnerable time of development (middle childhood) and thus he/she in general, faces tremendous challenges regarding his/her roles and responsibilities. Namely though relatively well aware of one's individual persona as well as skills, it is most likely that a child at the time of abduction is not quite aware of the source of his/her emotions. Therefore it is natural for a child to feel confused about what is expected from him/her. A child is known to become aware of diverse characteristics through relationships and thus it is highly possible that traits of both commanders and other soldier are assimilated. Depending on the time spent with the LRA symbolic elements of war, military life and weapons may thus become part of one's identity. Nevertheless in regards to understanding what is right and what is wrong the research shows that a child combatant very often expresses notions of questioning and realizing the

'new' situation. This said it seems that while a child may understand fairly well the circumstances, the extreme change in his/her social network has a strong influence on how he/she perceives himself/herself. As most interaction is of command and forcing, which a child obeys either by feeling sad or neutral, it is clear that he/she obtains the role of a submissive follower or at times, when given rank, as a leader. This is not to say however that the child does not have a mind of his/her own, but that the circumstances do not allow freedom to explore other plausible roles. One is always to follow orders and at times even to give them; the culture of the bush involves hierarchy, authority, and above all dictated norms and values.

Knowing this it comes to no surprise that a returning child/adolescent feels bewildered and out of the norm; one has to leave behind one's daily routines, the law and order, along with one's identity as a soldier. What makes the situation in many cases even more difficult is that if a child is seen as being possessed by then he/she is held responsible for the atrocities done. Especially in adolescence when self understanding, morals, values and life in general are questioned the homecoming may be very difficult. This is supported by the conducted research that show how several expressions indicate of mixed emotions in relation to self perception after return (Blattman & Annan, 2006). Home suddenly might not feel like home anymore and the previous identity attached to it may feel extremely distant if not even lost. Thus one may argue that though in general adolescents are viewed to be autonomous and less dependent of control, former child combatants reflect intense need of guidance and support. Seeing that the research shows that many of the individuals think about the past events and the people they have met in the bush, it is clear that their past is still very much part of the present. Additionally when referring to themselves the former child combatants most often use terms that indicate of roles in the LRA. For these reasons, as suggested by Dickson-Gomes (2008) combining both present and past emotional ties is significant for reconstructing one's 'new' self-concept. Furthermore though many of the taught roles and skills may be irrelevant for life in civil society it is important to acknowledge that some of the skills acquired, such as leadership, may strengthen the feeling of self worth if enhanced.

*Will you please guide me?*

Though evidently life with the LRA has a different impact on each child combatant everyone is to some degree affected by the military life. For this reason it is believed that discussing the different roles and responsibilities in both the army and civil society may help the children/adolescence to understand what his/her stance in relation to others has been, is, as well as can become. In other words this involves the roles that the former child combatants never got to gain knowledge of while

living with the LRA. As pointed out earlier, it is vital to acknowledge the strengths and skills of the formerly abducted youth. Nevertheless, as earlier maintained by Dickson-Gomes (2008), the purpose should not be to re-educate but to establish an understanding of the experiences and varied situations. Finally it is believed that though primarily the child is the one who is approached, the guidance is bi-directional as the community eventually will reflect back on the behaviour of the former child combatants.

## Collective Identity

The research shows that the former child combatants express strong indication of group cohesion while living with the LRA. The expressions are reflected with both positive and negative affect, which is different to expressions of I that show no indication of positive feelings. Hence it demonstrates that child combatants find a sense of joy and support merely from being with each other, which equals to that of a collective culture. At many times the collective identity of child combatants is also related to joint effort and wish to win the war and bring down the government. Yet at the same time the results show that the children may not be fully aware of what is going on, besides war. For this reason one may argue that a former child combatant, who might not comprehend the underlying principles of the conflict, may find it extremely challenging to defend himself/herself when being bullied by community members and peers. This is important to stress for the reason that it is not mentioned in previous research and may be extremely useful knowledge in terms of community reconciliation.

It is not possible to say if group cohesion during life with the LRA is any stronger than before abduction due to the fact that the research did not explore this particular period. However what is evident is that collective identity is near to invisible after return. This is striking for it signifies of hardly any feelings of togetherness and belonging after return. It is especially alarming knowing the importance of peers, relationships and group bonding both in middle childhood and adolescence. Therefore it can be argued that former child combatants not only feel confused about their self-concept, but also of how to identify themselves with peers or as part of the community, which evidently is extremely important in a collective society. What is more is that the few times the former child combatants express themselves in collective terms is with indication to their past and hence it demonstrates that they still consider 'we' as the group of child combatants. Consistency is found with the claim of Dickson-Gomes (2008) and Dowdney (2007) who point out that former child combatants often are driven to bond with each other, thus strengthening their feeling of self

worth and belongingness. Indeed it is only natural to bond with people who share same experiences, yet at the same time it is a daily reminder of the harsh times in the bush. All said in order to connect to another form of 'we' it then requires serious recognition and renegotiation of the former social dynamics, including alliances and group perspective formed during the stay with the LRA.

### *One for all and all for one*

As the collective identity shows to be extremely high during abduction and low afterwards it seems crucial to involve the youth with community members, especially peers. Nonetheless seeing the obstacles that exist where bonds of trust and belief have been broken the challenges certainly are deep rooted. Thus it is believed that common faith may break the walls between 'others' and 'I', eventually creating a sense of being an important part of the great whole. At the same time however it is vital not to break the connections with the new 'family structure' that reflects the times in the bush; the shift from past to present and eventually even the future needs to be gradual. Furthermore it is seen that reflecting upon the diverse forms of governing may aid the formerly abducted youth in grasping the difference between bush life with hierarchy and dictated orders, and democratic civil society.

## Relations to other People

### *Perception of people in general*

Regarding their time of abduction former child combatants reflect disbelief towards rebels and commanders, yet also warm feelings in relation to civilians, thus indicating that even under harsh and crude authoritarian rule people can be seen as significant fellow human beings. Nevertheless having said this most feelings concerning both verbal communication and interaction are expressed with neutral or negative connotation. Hence the degree of uplifting feelings is questionable. Interestingly former child combatant's perception of people does not change much between the time with the LRA and after. As the research shows, commanding changes to mocking and insulting by community members and peers. The equal amount of distress and sadness expressed in relation to people is seen as the most unexpected result, particularly considering that the social contexts are so unlike. The difference is however that many of the expressions after return are assumed, and hence it is questionable what it is that returning child combatants actually expect from other people. Broadly speaking due to their experience with the LRA it is likely that they have lost their trust and belief in other people, thus this should be seen as a vital aspect in regards to social relations. Another crucial aspect is that former child combatants express belief that everyone 'can kill'. This

of course is to some extent understandable considering their background, yet it is imperative to underline as it is part of some of the youth's fundamental idea of people. To recognize this may be significant in trying to reunite former child combatants with community.

### *There is no place like home*

In comparison to previous research (Betancourt, 2008) where 94% of returning child combatants in Northern Uganda were welcomed without blame or abuse the results obtained from the conducted research show slightly more mixed emotions. Namely while some were accepted others were rejected. In general the expressions reflect that home and acceptance of family are significant for a returning child combatant, which somewhat contradicts the idea that adolescents value home and family less than friends. Then again, as friends are also scarce for many former child combatants, the importance of family amplifies. It is also imperative to question cultural values, as Uganda is a collective society it seems relatively important for a child to get family acceptance especially as one's self-concept is defined by relations. Finally it is interesting to notice the invisible role of siblings, which as pointed out by Chrobok & Akutu (2008) may be because of their fright of being associated with the LRA and therefore also being stigmatized and teased.

### *How to be a Friend?*

Friends as a 'category' of social relations is interesting in the sense that it is only referred to in regards to time after the LRA. The plausible reason behind this may be that friends during the time with the LRA are most often expressed as 'we'. Seeing this yet another challenge confronted by former child combatants, especially by those who have been away for years, is to comprehend various types of friendships. No longer is everyone part of one big 'family', and no longer is everyone kept under constant threat and control. Thus it may be difficult to associate with peers as the new norms may feel distant and different from to what one is used to. Or as maintained by Chrobok & Akutu (2008) peers may feel jealous for the assistance given to returning youth. Additionally one may feel that one's peers might not necessarily relate to one's needs, in particular regarding belongingness and comfort. Having said this however it is important to keep in mind that the life at the IDP camps where many of the children and adolescent return to is not so safe and thus mutual caring and protection may be much stronger than thought. In fact the results of the research show mixed messages where friends indeed are someone 'whom one visits' and conversely, 'who one used to visit'. As stated by Buhrmester (1992) friendship in adolescence is generally valued above family; they are viewed as confidantes, and thus lack of close relationships with peers might lead to depression (Durkin, 1995). Ultimately it needs to be stressed that when losing a peer in

middle childhood it has a devastating effect (Durkin, 1995). As this most likely would have happened to unfortunately everyone while living with the LRA, it is crucial to keep in mind when considering relations to friends.

### *How to fit in?*

In general it is believed that contact between former child combatants and community members is central for forming mutual understanding and forgiveness. This entails faith, along with healing and rituals as discussed above, but also capacity building of specific individuals, such as teachers, who are in the position to aid in re-establishing a feeling of self-worth and stability, which further might promote the development of social networks. Moreover to reduce stigmatization and insult it could be advantageous to raise awareness of the psychosocial challenges that child combatants go through under forced conditions. This of course has to be regarded in relation to cultural traditions where spirituality plays a crucial part. Therefore it is vital to stress the significance of involving locals with the activities planned by Western dominated non governmental aid organisations. Ultimately social change should involve everybody and not solely the formerly abducted youth.

### **Future Implications**

On the whole research on child combatants mostly explores their experiences in regards to individual trauma and their general adjustment to community life after return. For this reason it is vital to recognize former child combatants in their social context, namely by including social, cultural, economic and political aspects. In other words their challenging circumstances ought to be seen from a holistic viewpoint for the reason that all features involved are interlinked with each other. It is seen as beneficial in terms of strengthening their social networks and in improving their psychosocial outcomes. Especially in collective societies where the role of other people and the environment are extremely important for an individual, acknowledgment of these aspects are seen as vital in regards to positive long term outcome.

As for suggestions for future research in terms of social relations of child combatants it would be essential to investigate common strengths, such as leadership amongst returning youth. This knowledge could be a useful resource in terms of viewing the youth as active agents rather than passive victims, thus encouraging empowerment. Teachers, social workers and other community members could further apply this knowledge in their work. This said it is also relevant to question how for instance teachers and social workers both recognize symptoms of distress among youth, and provide support. Furthermore in regards to education, it seems unsure whether the formerly

abducted youth fully comprehends the ‘political’ situation and thus it would be vital to further investigate their perspectives on this matter.

It is surprising that not much indication of gender differences is shown in previous research on child combatants. Since gender studies as a subject matter is extremely contemporary, the ideology behind the previous studies ought to be questioned. Again knowledge on gender specific aspects would be important considering psychosocial interventions as well as capacity development.

Finally in order to grasp how to build stronger bonds between formerly abducted youth and community members it would be significant to explore how these two “groups” interact with each other. Also the needs and challenges of belonging to for instance, peer groups and community could shade light on the same question. Especially in regards to peer interaction, it would also be valuable to comprehend challenges with intimate relationships as many of the returning youth are adolescences and may feel confused about their role as man/woman. What further ought to be questioned are the plausible difficulties in maintaining relationships. Conclusively it would be essential to understand the role of traditional healing and how these practises, along with other important cultural elements are best incorporated with Western models of treatment.

## Research Limitations

As no pervious research was found on social relations in regards to child combatants it limited the researcher to some extent in comparing the findings and formulating supporting arguments. Nevertheless as the phenomenological approach allows for subjective perspectives to emerge, the research, though an exclusive study, entails valued findings of individual reflections of experiences. Furthermore due to ethical reasons the researcher was not able to collect the material herself, which unfortunately ruled out the option of being able to study in depth individual cases. Nevertheless at the same time the selected material allowed for including viewpoints of hundreds of people which would have been impossible for the researcher to collect on her own. Additionally as the material consist of interviews with Ugandan youth there is the possibility of some errors in translation, particularly due to differences in cultural concepts. Also because of a time restriction certain parts of the text needed to be selected and only the most dominating features were analysed, thus limiting the research to specific aspects. Furthermore the study spectrum of ‘social relations of child combatants in Uganda’ is rather extensive and involves challenging questions. But again because of no pervious research it was seen as impossible to narrow down the topic. Further it is imperative to point out the immense challenge to fully incorporate cultural values and beliefs, nevertheless the



cross cultural theories described and the methodology used for subjective meaning construction allows for an open and flexible analysis. Conclusively the research is not to be generalized but to be seen as one way to view the deep rooted problems of social relations in Ugandan child combatants.

## Conclusion

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There are not enough words to describe the crude experiences Ugandan child combatants go through each day. These children, who otherwise might be in school learning calculus or out in the field playing, are forced to perform brutal acts on civilians, peers and even family members. Thus they commonly seek comfort and company from other abductees and manage to survive by suppressing their feeling and simply facing the reality. Their lives might seem rather fictional to people who live in safe and democratic societies, but these children's realities exist. Thankfully many of the young souls manage to escape the violent environment where the rules and orders are commanded by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately however, for many, home might not feel like home anymore. The social world of the bush with the new roles and relations has influenced the child's emotions, beliefs and perceptions of life, oneself and other people.

With a wish to be able to understand the daily conformations of former child combatants in Uganda this research was set to analyse the multiple challenges regarding their social relations both during and after life with the LRA. As a theoretical standpoint phenomenology provides the ultimate means to understand the life worlds of the formerly abducted youth.

The research shows that former child combatants often express mixed emotions in regards to their self-concept. They frequently think back at the times in the bush, their roles and routines and thus express a need of guidance and emotional support after return. Even at the stage of adolescence many may not be ready to accept the autonomous life style. Yet at the same time one may argue that young people are effective agents of change and thus the strengths and skills of these young people ought to be acknowledged.

One of the most significant findings in terms of social relations is that formerly abducted youth show hardly any sign of togetherness and belongingness. After the bush life where peers often become a substitute family they suddenly feel estranged and distressed of the new principles of bonding. This is why the role of family, peers, teacher, social workers and community member in general is seen as vital. Based on the expressed distress and needs of the formerly abducted youth, it is suggested that community systems ought to be integrated in the process of their adjustment to the new social context. They are in the position to aid in re-establishing a feeling of self-worth and

stability. For the numerous Western organisations this involves integration of both local knowledge and cultural traditions. As a culture of collective welfare Ugandan society is seen as an ideal environment for promoting positive change.

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